

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



MARCH 1982

\$1.75



47744

**The New Mike Shayne
Adventure
HAVOC IN
HIGH PLACES**

**by Brett
Halliday**

**stories by:
MEL D. AMES
JON L. BREEN
HAL CHARLES
JOSEPH
COMMINGS
JAY FOX
JERRY
JACOBSON
SUSANNE
SHAPHREN**

**A Momentous
Encounter:
HOLMES
MEETS
WATSON!**



**STIFF
COMPETITION
Book Reviews
by JOHN BALL**



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This Is Your Last Chance

to get the big 1972 MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE ANNUAL. Published ten years ago, this annual is a collector's item difficult to find. Every Mike Shayne fan should have it. It contains as the lead story KILL MIKE SHAYNE, a short novel by Brett Halliday not published in the monthly magazine. In addition, there are seventeen short stories and novelets by Dan Ross, Fletcher Flora, Edward D. Hoch, Carl Henry Rathjen, and other masters of the mystery story.

A limited number of these big 192-page MSMM Annuals are available, so act now. Clip or copy the coupon below and send \$2.50 for each annual desired. You'll be glad you did!

TO: RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
P.O. Box 178
RESEDA, CA 91335



Send me the 1972 MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE ANNUAL. I've enclosed my check or money order for \$2.50 for each annual wanted.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Allow 6-8 weeks for delivery.

MARCH 1982
ISSN 0026-3621
VOLUME 46
NUMBER 3

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

EDWARD GOLDSTEIN
ANITA GOLDSTEIN
Publishers

CHARLES E. FRITCH
Editor

ROMELLE EATON
Art Director

LEO MARGULIES
Founder

HAVOC IN HIGH PLACES

by Brett Halliday

Mike Shayne was trapped in the penthouse of a high-rise building, while outside a killer hurricane ravaged Miami and threatened to topple the building. But nature wasn't the only villain. One of the people in the penthouse was also a killer, intent on carrying out murder! 4

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY
MAGAZINE, Vol. 46, No. 3,
March 1982. Published
monthly by Renown Publications,
Inc., P.O. Box 178,
Reseda, CA 91335. Subscription,
One Year (12 issues) \$18.00; Two Years (24 issues) \$32.00; Canada, One Year \$21.00; Two Years \$38.00; Foreign, One Year \$24.00; Two Years \$40.00. (U.S. Funds Only). Second Class postage paid at Van Nuys, CA and at additional mailing offices. Events and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. Copyright © 1982 by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American Conventions. Printed in the United States of America.
- Postmaster - return P.O. Box 178, Reseda, CA 91335.

NOVELETS

VALENTINE FOR A DEAD LADY

Mel D. Ames 43

STRATHMORE'S FLIGHT

Jerry Jacobson 67

SHORT STORIES

FELIX CULPA

Hal Charles 85

ALIAS ROSCOE BRENT

Jay Fox 93

SAYING GOOD-BY TO RICHARD

Susanne Shaphren 101

THE PUN DETECTIVE AND THE DANNY BOY KILLER

Jon L. Breen 105

DRESSED TO KILL

Joseph Commings 109

FEATURES

HOLMES MEETS WATSON: A Momentous Encounter 100

MIKE'S MAIL (Letters from Readers) 125

STIFF COMPETITION (Book Reviews)

John Ball 126

The hurricane raged outside, threatening to crash in the penthouse where Shayne and the Darington family were trapped. One of the family was a killer, and the redhead had to find out which one — before the killer found him!

Havoc In High Places

by **BRETT HALLIDAY**

THE CLOUDS SCUDDING IN OVER THE ATLANTIC toward Miami were low and dark. Michael Shayne stood in the window of his office, looking past the buildings of the downtown area at the incoming storm. He could see palm trees in the median of a boulevard several blocks away whipping about violently as the wind picked up.

"Damn it all, anyway," Lucy Hamilton said from behind him. "You just get back in town and get healed up from that business on San Marigal, and then a hurricane has to hit."

"We've ridden out hurricanes before," Shayne grunted. He looked and sounded casual as he stood there, a tall, well-built man with coarse red hair and craggy features. But Lucy, who had been his secretary for most of the years that he had been a private detective, could tell that he was tense.

"We could go inland," she suggested, not really expecting him to agree to that.

Shayne put a cigarette in his mouth and rasped a match into life to light it. Blowing smoke toward the ceiling, he shook his head. "Could be worse there. And with everybody else evacuating, we'd just add to the crowding and confusion. The NWS says the eye will come ashore a pretty good way to the north. Riding out the fringes of it here shouldn't be too hard."

Lucy went back to what she had been doing, pulling papers from the filing cabinet and transferring them to a cardboard box. When it had first become obvious from the weather reports that Miami was in for

quite a blow, Shayne had decided to take the most important things from his Flagler Street office and keep them with him in his apartment. The apartment was in an old, sturdy building close to the Miami River, and Shayne felt confident it would be unaffected by the storm. During his years in this area, it had been buffeted by strong winds many times, with only occasional and minor damage.

"All right," Lucy said, closing the cardboard box. "I think that's all of it, Michael. Are you ready to go?"

Shayne swung away from the window and nodded. "I suppose so. We can go by your place and pick up whatever you'll need for the next couple of days."

"You've got plenty of food, haven't you?"

A grin stretched Shayne's lean face. "The freezer's full of steaks, and I laid in a fresh supply of Martell a few days ago. We'll be able to make do."

"In fine style, it sounds like," Lucy laughed. The light sound of her laughter was at odds with the worry in her eyes.

Shayne scooped his hat from the desk, settled it on his head, then hefted the box. Lucy went out in front of him, into the outer office, and headed for the rack in the corner to get her jacket. Her purse was on her desk, and she picked it up as she went by.

The shrill ring of the telephone made her jump.

HER EYES FLICKED TO THE PHONE, then to Shayne's impassive countenance. She raised an eyebrow and said, "Do I answer it?"

"We weren't out the door yet," Shayne said. "I guess we're still open for business."

Lucy sighed and picked up the ringing phone. "Michael Shayne's office."

Shayne watched her face as she paused to listen to the caller. She was frowning prettily. He knew she was scared by the approaching storm, even though she had lived in Florida for many years and was familiar with hurricanes. Maybe that familiarity was why she was bothered, Shayne mused. He had run into some pretty terrible things during his years in the business, but the unleashed forces of nature were still enough to create a feeling of uneasy awe in anyone.

For example, it wasn't even four o'clock in the afternoon, a time when Miami was ordinarily bright and sunny, but today, the sky outside looked like night was falling. Even here in the office, there seemed to be a chill in the air, Shayne noted. Maybe it was only psychological. Maybe it wasn't.

"I'm sorry, we'll be out of the office for a few days," Lucy was

saying into the receiver now. "I'm afraid we can't take on any more cases right now."

Shayne put the box down on her desk and kept an eye on her, seeing how she was looking more harried by the second. One of his bushy red eyebrows quirked upwards as she went on, "I'm sorry, I realize it's important that you see Mr. Shayne, but I'm afraid it's impossible until after this storm —". She broke off exasperatedly as the person on the other end evidently interrupted her.

Shayne held out a big-knuckled hand. "Let me have it," he said. "I'll get rid of them."

Lucy handed him the phone gratefully. Shayne took it from her, propped it on his left shoulder, and said around his cigarette, "This is Mike Shayne. Listen, pal, we're battening down the hatches until after this hurricane blows over. Give us a call then."

A female voice spoke in his ear, sounding angry and strong. "That's all well and good, Mr. Shayne, but I imagine I shall be dead by then. "Couldn't I persuade you to come see me now?"

Shayne shot a glance at Lucy, who shrugged her shoulders. He said, "Who is this?"

"My name is Amelia Darington." The voice was that of an older woman, but one who was still vital and energetic. Shayne cast his mind back over the information he kept on file in his mental recesses and came up with a face to match the name. He had seen it in pictures in the society pages. Amelia Darington was always attending some charitable function or other, as befitted a very wealthy, civic-minded widow, despite a crippling disease that had left her in a wheelchair. If Shayne remembered right, her husband had been one of the richest men in the country at one time, as well as one of the primary movers and shakers in the Miami area.

"Well, Mrs. Darington," Shayne said slowly, "I don't see how I could come to see you right now. We're closing the office, and I won't be taking any more cases until after the storm. Surely you've exaggerated and won't be dead then —"

"How can you know that?" Amelia Darington cut in on him sharply, and he had to admit her point. With a hurricane in the area, no one could be sure of being alive when it passed. But he knew from the sound of her voice that a storm wasn't what had the woman worried. "It's worth a great deal of money to me, Mr. Shayne," she was continuing. "If you could come to my penthouse, perhaps we could clear this up in the time we have left before the hurricane arrives."

"Clear what up?" Shayne asked, well aware of the looks Lucy was

giving him. She wanted them out of there and safely ensconced in his apartment.

"Mr. Shayne," Amelia Darington said, "I think someone is trying to murder me."

THE FIRST FLURRY OF RAIN SUDDENLY SLAPPED against the windows, as if it was following a stage direction.

Shayne took a deep breath, hardly aware that his free hand was straying up to tug at his earlobe. Lucy looked dismayed when she saw that, knowing that he had just heard something that intrigued him.

"In that case, you should call the police," Shayne told his caller.

"I don't want the police," Amelia Darington said quickly. "This situation is much too sensitive for them to handle. I need someone who is competent and discreet, and I know from Mr. Rourke's articles in the paper that you fit the description. Will you do it, Mr. Shayne? Will you come over here?" She rattled off an address, which Shayne committed to memory without thinking about it. "Will you help an old woman save her life?"

He was just about to make some retort about the melodramatic light she was putting on things, when there was an abrupt blast of sound on the other end of the line. A clatter came right on its heels, and Shayne straightened suddenly, a frown drawing grim lines in his forehead. "Mrs. Darington?" he barked, fingers tightening on the receiver. "Are you all right? Mrs. Darington!"

There was a clicking on the line, and then it went silent as the lights in the office flickered out, too. Shayne heard Lucy's gasp in the sudden silence.

He listened to the nothingness on the line for a moment longer, then cradled the phone and looked over at Lucy in the gloom. "The line went dead just as the lights went out," he said. "The wind must have gotten quite a few poles at once." He could hear it whistling outside now. It wasn't a nice sound.

Lucy swallowed. "Michael, what was that about? That woman sounded frantic. I hated to turn her down, but what else can we do?"

Shayne rubbed at his jaw, his mood about as dark as the sky outside. "Listen, Angel, that was Amelia Darington, the rich old society lady. She said somebody was trying to kill her."

"She must have been hysterical. Goodness, you can't blame her, with this awful storm coming in."

"That's what I thought, too, until just before the line went dead."

Lucy was wary now. "And what happened then?"

Shayne looked intently at her. "Somebody fired a shot. The phone fell."

Her hand went to her mouth. "Do you think —"

"I don't know what to think. But I know I can't just let it ride. I'm going to go over there and check it out, Angel."

HE TOOK A STEP TOWARD THE DOOR, but Lucy reached out and stopped him with a hand on his arm. The pressure from her slender fingers told him how worried she was.

"Can't you call Will and let his men handle it?" she asked.

"Gentry's cops are going to have their hands full with all the other problems this hurricane will bring," Shayne answered. "The whole thing could still amount to nothing. It won't take long to find out. The address she gave me isn't much out of the way. You go on to my place in your car, and I'll be there as soon as I can. Just be careful; it's starting to rain pretty hard, and that wind's strong, too."

"Michael . . ."

Shayne put his hands on her shoulders and bent his head to kiss her lightly on the lips. "Don't worry about me, Angel. Hell, I was in Tampico once when a real hurricane came in. Tore the place up something awful. But I came through without a scratch. And you'll be fine at my apartment. It's only a few minutes from here, and you're a good driver." His voice dropped but became more intense. "I don't like this a damn bit, but somebody's asked for my help, Angel. I've got to go." A smile creased his features. "She promised me a good fee, too. We'll need all the money we can get hold of if the storm does any damage here."

Lucy's fingers curled in his shirt for a moment, then she let him go and stepped back, a smile on her face as well. Shayne could tell that it was forced, but there was acceptance in her eyes. She said, "Go on, Michael. I don't suppose I could feel the way I do about you if you could just ignore other people's problems. But you hurry up, understand? This business is making me nervous."

Shayne grinned. "Sure. Listen, if I haven't gotten to the apartment in an hour, then call the cops and tell them where I went and what's going on." He swung toward the door, gave her a glance over his shoulder as he went out, then headed down to the basement garage where he kept his Buick.

As he went, he kept thinking about the sound he had heard over the phone. It had been a gunshot, all right, he was sure of that.

And if there was anything that Mike Shayne was intimately familiar with, it was all the myriad sounds of violence.

II

AS HE WHEELED THE BUICK THROUGH THE RAIN-SLICK streets, the windshield wipers beating a steady cadence as they tried to keep up with the moisture, he listened to a grim-voiced radio announcer tracking the speed and course of Hurricane Livia as it headed for the coast.

There were broad areas where no lights burned, telling Shayne that the electricity was out there. It didn't seem to have failed all over the city, though, since he passed buildings where lights still burned brightly. He avoided the freeways, knowing that fleeing residents would have them choked and motionless for the most part. The radio kept announcing the status of the evacuation and broadcasting instructions for people who wished to leave the city.

Shayne passed a bar with a huge hand-lettered sign outside, proclaiming a hurricane party inside. Through his rain-spattered window, he could see people going inside, preparing to wait out the storm fortified by a large amount of liquor. He shook his head. There was nothing wrong with sitting out a hurricane, in his mind, but it was foolish to get drunk while you were doing it. A real emergency could arise in a hurry, and the people at the hurricane parties would be in no shape to handle it.

It took him at least ten minutes longer than it usually would have to reach the address Amelia Darington had given him. When he spotted the building, he had to repress a groan. It was one of the newer buildings downtown, a towering, glass-sided monolith, exactly the kind of place he would normally avoid like the plague during a storm. It was a combination of offices and apartments, and judging by the blaze of illumination coming from its windows, the electricity was still on here. Shayne turned the Buick toward the curb and slid into an empty parking place.

Holding his hat firmly on his rumpled red hair, Shayne kicked his door open and darted out onto the sidewalk, sprinting for the overhang that shielded the building's doors. Even though he was only exposed to the driving rain for a second, he was still wet enough to be uncomfortable when he reached the doors and bulled inside.

He took his hat off, shook water from it, and found an elevator. No one else was in evidence in the lobby of the building. Shayne pushed a button to summon the elevator and waited until it whined down to the ground floor. He would have preferred not to trust this means of conveyance, since he could well wind up stuck between floors if the power failed, but Amelia Darington had said she was in the penthouse,

and that was at least twenty floors above him.

THE RIDE UP WAS NERVE-WRACKING, never knowing if the car would grind to a halt, but several moments later, the light above the door indicated that Shayne had reached the top floor. He went out into a foyer as soon as the doors slid back and found himself looking at yet another elevator. This one was private, leading only to the penthouse, and there was a call button next to it, with a microphone and speaker built into the panel.

Shayne pressed the button, waited a few seconds, and then a man's voice, made tinny by the speaker, came back. "Yes?"

"Mike Shayne. I'm supposed to see Mrs. Amelia Darington. We spoke on the phone a little while ago."

"Just a moment, sir." There was a pause while the man, evidently a servant, went to check on whether or not Shayne was expected. Then the speaker said, "I'll send the elevator right down, Mr. Shayne."

The elevator door opened shortly, and Shayne boarded it, feeling the building shiver just slightly under his feet as the wind whipped at it outside.

The car slid upward smoothly, taking only seconds to lift him to the penthouse. When the door opened, he stepped out onto thick, wine-red carpet. He was in a small anteroom with dark wood on the walls and subdued lighting. There was no one there to meet him, so he crossed the room in a couple of long strides and opened the door on the other side.

"Goddamn it!" someone said as Shayne opened the door. "You just can't stop sniping at me, can you?"

A hard, flat sound that Shayne recognized as a slap followed the words.

He stepped onto even thicker carpet. The anteroom door opened into a living room, wide and deep and furnished with heavy, expensive furniture. Shayne's eyes picked out a bar on the left side of the room, and directly opposite the anteroom was a huge picture window, giving a view of Miami, Biscayne Bay, and Miami Beach beyond. It would have been a beautiful vista ordinarily, but now it was filled with the storm.

A man and a woman were standing in the center of the big room, and as Shayne watched, the man struck the woman again, making her wince and gasp in pain. A red mark stood out in sharp relief against one pale cheek.

Shayne barked, "Hold it!" as the man's hand drew back once again.

THEY BOTH TURNED JERKILY TO FACE HIM. The woman was lovely, in her late twenties, with a fine figure and sandy hair that fell to her shoulders loosely. She wore slacks and a silk blouse. The man was handsome, in a too-sleek way. Tall and broad-shouldered, with smooth dark hair, he wore an expensive suit and looked every bit the rising young executive. He glared at Shayne and said, "Who the hell are you?"

"My name's Mike Shayne," the big redhead snapped. "Don't you think you'd better quit slapping the lady around?"

The man had hold of the woman's wrist with his left hand, and he gave it a jerk as he said, "The lady happens to be a slut, as well as my wife. So you can just butt out, mister."

Shayne stepped closer. "I don't think so. What's this all about?"

"None of your goddamned business!" The man released the woman's wrist and moved around between her and Shayne. Shayne could see her peering over the man's shoulder, though, and there was an appeal for help in her green eyes.

"What about it, lady?" Shayne asked. "Do you need some help?"

The man's face twisted in a grimace of rage. "I told you, stay out of this!" Before the woman could say anything, he had stepped even closer to Shayne and was launching a punch at the detective.

Shayne moved his head to the side easily, letting the blow whip past his ear harmlessly, and he stepped on in, hooking a bony fist to the man's middle. It crashed home, sending the man's breath exploding out of his lungs. He staggered back a step, folding up, and his knees hit a low ottoman. He went over backwards, landing heavily on the carpet as he clutched at his stomach.

"Thank you," the woman said to Shayne in a husky voice. "I was afraid he was going to really hurt me this time."

Shayne was about to make a reply when a new voice cracked across the room. It demanded, "What's all this?" Shayne recognized it from the phone conversation earlier. He turned toward the newcomer.

An elderly woman rolled into the room through a broad door, her wheelchair moving with a motorized whine. She wasn't a big woman, Shayne could tell that even while she was sitting down, but her thin face, topped with carefully-styled white hair, held a power that many younger women would have envied. The vestiges of great beauty were still there, and even though they had faded over the years, the woman's inner strength more than made up for the passage of time.

The man Shayne had knocked down was getting to his feet, and he said, "He came in here like a crazy man, Mother. He attacked me for no good reason —"

"No, not a good reason at all," Shayne cut in. "Just that you were slapping your wife around like you wanted to kill her."

The woman in the wheelchair swung toward Shayne. "I know what my son is capable of, Mr. Shayne," she said. "I assume you are Michael Shayne?"

"I'm Shayne. And you're Amelia Darington?"

"That's right," the old woman said. "I see you've already made the acquaintance of these two. This is my son, Ron, and my daughter-in-law, Janet."

Shayne's eyes were flicking around the room as Amelia Darington spoke. He was sure that had been a gunshot he had heard earlier, and he had halfway expected to walk in on a murder scene. But other than the marital violence he had broken up, the penthouse seemed to be peaceful. The same couldn't be said of the weather outside. Large drops of rain lashed at the big picture window.

Amelia Darington pressed a lever on her wheelchair and sent it rolling closer to Shayne. She went on, "I'm very glad you came promptly, Mr. Shayne. I know it was a problem for you, with this storm and all. But I'll make it worth your while, I promise you."

Ron Darington was still glaring at Shayne and rubbing his sore stomach. "What's this all about?" he demanded to know. "Who is this man, Mother?"

"This man is the best private detective in the city, according to the people who should know," Amelia told her son. "And he's here because I asked him to come. You should remember that, Ron."

Shayne felt impatience tugging at him. He wanted to get this over with, whatever it was, so that he could get on to his apartment. Lucy would probably start worrying as soon as she got there, if not sooner. Shayne said, "If we could get down to business, Mrs. Darington . . .?"

"I want you to meet the rest of my family first, Mr. Shayne. It will only take a moment." She spun the chair with practiced ease and called out toward an open door on the other side of the room, next to the bar, "Everyone in the living room, please."

A MOMENT LATER, A GIRL CAME STROLLING THROUGH THE door into the room. She gave Shayne and the others a negligent glance and walked over to Amelia. Shayne had to admit that she was an extraordinarily beautiful girl. She had long, straight brown hair with a trace of honey color in it, and her lithe figure was shown off to its best advantage in a tight-fitting, mannish shirt and high-cut shorts. Hardly the kind of clothes to wear to a hurricane, but effective, Shayne had to give her that.

The man who came into the room after her also had his eyes on her. He looked as if he rarely took them off of her. He wore a suit much like Ron Darington's, but he was fair where Ron was dark. His face was broad and open, and the look on it could only be described as adoration.

"What's up, Mother?" the girl asked. "Ron and Janet going at it again?"

"Be quiet, Lois," Amelia snapped. "And watch what you say about your brother. William, come on over here."

The fair-headed man joined them, and Amelia looked back over at Shayne. "My other child," she said, nodding toward the girl, "my daughter Lois. And this is her fiance, William Patten. William is a vice-president of Darington Enterprises as well. You two, this gentleman is Michael Shayne."

"The private eye?" Patten exclaimed. "What's going on here, Mrs. Darington?"

"I know you're all full of questions," Amelia continued, as if unaware of what Patten had said. "They'll all be cleared up shortly, I hope. Now, if we can get Braddock in here . . ." She pressed another button on her chair.

Yet another man in a suit appeared in the doorway, but this one was older, and his outfit seemed to be more of a uniform. He stood stiffly, his eyes on Amelia, and said, "Yes, Mrs. Darington?"

"Braddock," she said to Shayne, inclining her head at the older man. "He's my butler, driver, and whatever I want him to be. This is Mr. Shayne, Braddock. I told you he was coming."

"Yes, ma'am. I sent the elevator down for him, in fact. How do you do, Mr. Shayne?"

"Just fine," Shayne grunted, looking a little askance at the whole assemblage. So far, there was a matriarch, who appeared to run her family with an iron hand, a wastrel son, a daughter-in-law who was an unknown quantity, a beautiful daughter and an eager fiance, and the faithful family retainer. If it hadn't been for the storm outside and the shot he had heard over the telephone, he would have felt like he had stumbled into a production of an English drawing room drama.

"Mr. Shayne, I can tell just by looking at you that you want to ask a question," Amelia said. "By all means, go ahead."

"All right," Shayne nodded, his face grim. "Just who is it that you think is trying to kill you?"

A COLLECTIVE GASP WENT AROUND THE ROOM. Amelia smiled. She said, "One of these people is trying to kill me, and I'll pay you very

well indeed to find out which one, Mr. Shayne. They were all here earlier when someone fired a shot at me while we were talking on the telephone. No one else was here, and no one has left. You can see the bullet hole right over there in the wall."

Shayne followed her gesture as the others all gaped and started to murmur among themselves. He walked across the room to a table on which sat the telephone, and as he bent over and studied the small hole in the plaster of the wall, he again felt a shiver through the floor under his feet. He ignored it and took out his knife. Ron Darington said, "Here! What are you doing?"

Shayne flipped the blade open and started to pry into the hole. A moment later, a flattened pellet of metal fell out into his hand. He held it up and scrutinized it for a second, then said with certainty, "A .32 slug, all right. I guess you're right, Mrs. Darington. We've got a would-be killer here in this room."

There was a boom of thunder from outside, a fresh slap of rain against the glass, and then the lights in the room went out suddenly, plunging the place into shadowy gloom.

"Now that's timing for you," Shayne said.

III

LOIS DARINGTON GAVE A MUFFLED SCREAM as the darkness closed in. Shayne ignored her as he strode over to the window, peering out at the downtown area. Patches of it had been dark before, but now it was totally blacked out for as far as he could see. This was a power failure that affected all of Miami, from the looks of it.

Amelia was saying, "Braddock, get the candles out and light them. Stay calm, everyone. We'll have plenty of light in a moment."

Shayne turned away from the window, looked at the little group of people in the room. They seemed to have drawn closer together, as if the animosities there had suddenly seemed less important in the semi-darkness. Braddock was over at one side of the room, rummaging in a desk drawer for the candles Amelia had told him to light.

"Where are the stairs?" Shayne asked sharply.

Amelia shook her head. "There are no stairs. The elevator is the only way down. But you don't have to worry about being stuck here, Mr. Shayne. This building has an emergency generator, and the elevators are on that circuit. They'll be running again in no time."

Ron broke off from the group and started for the door to the ante-room. "I'm going to check on that," he said, his voice tight and strained. "The last thing I want is to be trapped up here in a storm,

especially with all this crazy murder talk going on."

"I'll go with you," William Patten said, moving after Ron.

Shayne watched them go into the anteroom. The three women were watching as well, and Janet and Lois were exchanging worried looks. Lois seemed to have lost some of her self-possessed cool.

There was a rasp of a match from the side of the room, and a glare filled the air for a moment. Then Braddock was holding the flame to the wick of a candle. It caught, flickered for a few seconds, then settled down to burn with a steady glow. Braddock moved on to the other candles he had found.

Shayne walked slowly and deliberately toward the door where Ron and Patten had left the room. So far, they hadn't reappeared. Before Shayne could reach it, they came trudging back into the room, and Ron said, "It doesn't work. The elevator doesn't work, Mother. The generator must have failed!"

"Give it time," Amelia snapped. "It probably takes a few minutes to get started good —"

"I'm afraid not, Mrs. Darington," Patten said. "I had my finger on the button, when the power to the elevator came on just momentarily. You could hear it. But then it kind of whined and that was it. No juice again."

Amelia shook her head. "I don't understand it. When we built this building, we had the best emergency system installed and always kept it up to date —"

"What does that matter?" Ron demanded, a slight crack in his tones now. "We're trapped, that's all that matters. Trapped up here in this glass nightmare, in the most vicious hurricane in years!"

"Take it easy," Shayne advised in a low voice. "The brunt of the storm is supposed to pass north of here. You were planning on waiting it out here anyway, weren't you? You must have been, or else you'd be long gone."

Janet Darington answered him. "Oh, yes, we were planning on waiting it out, Mr. Shayne. My big tough husband didn't mind that as long as he had a choice in the matter. But now that he has to stay here, whether he wants to or not . . ."

"You shut up, Janet! No one asked for your opinion." Ron looked ashen in the candlelight, and his tone matched his appearance.

"Look," Shayne said quickly, not wanting them to start arguing, since he didn't want to have to deck Ron again, "like it or not, we're going to be here a while. Instead of getting all upset about the storm, why don't we get back to what we were discussing when the lights went out?"

"That stupid business about someone trying to kill Mother?" Ron asked. "Really, Mr. Shayne, you don't expect us to believe your melodramatics."

"A bullet going right past my head is not melodramatic!" Amelia told him. "I think Mr. Shayne is the only one of you with enough sense to really know what's going on here."

Shayne took the spent bullet from his pocket, where he had dropped it when the power failed, and flipped it in his hand. He said to Amelia, "Tell me exactly what happened when you were talking to me on the phone."

"Very well. I was calling you because I finally convinced myself that someone has indeed been trying to harm me. Several days ago, I found my medicines confused, and some very powerful tablets were mixed in with ordinary aspirin. Just glancing at them, you couldn't tell them apart. You had to look close. And before that, the brakes on my car were tampered with. Braddock and I nearly went off the causeway into the bay, didn't we, Braddock?"

"Yes, ma'am," the servant said quietly. "I checked the brakes out later, Mr. Shayne, and found that someone had cut the lines. A definite case of sabotage."

Shayne glanced at Braddock, wishing for better light so that he could read the man's face better. He had encountered more than one killer who had put himself into deliberate danger, just to throw suspicion off him. This could be one of those cases. But Braddock could also be telling the truth.

"It took me a couple of days to talk myself into believing what was obvious," Amelia continued. "I was to be the victim of a murder. So I called you, and while I was on the telephone, someone shot off a gun behind me, down that hall." She pointed. "I didn't get a look at them, of course; by the time I had gotten turned around they had ducked away down one of the other halls. But it had to be someone here."

"That's ridiculous, Mother," Lois said. "I didn't hear a shot. And why would any of us want to kill you?"

"A .32 might not be very loud, especially with a silencer," Shayne grunted. "But there's a question of motive, Mrs. Darington, as well as opportunity."

They were all looking at the old woman, and she seemed to relish the drama of the moment as she said, "You all had motives. It could have been any of you. You all want to see me dead."

That sounded a touch paranoid, even to Shayne. He took a deep breath and said, "You're going to have to explain that one, Mrs.

Darington. One at a time, why do these people, your family, want you dead?"

"Isn't it obvious?" she barked at Shayne. "It's because they are my family. I'm a rich old woman, Mr. Shayne. Ron and Lois will each inherit a considerable fortune when I die."

As Lois cried, "No!" and Ron looked sick at his stomach but kept quiet, Shayne tugged at his ear and said, "What about Janet and Patten?"

"I'll answer my part of that, Mr. Shayne," Janet replied before Amelia could say anything. "I'm planning on divorcing Ron in the near future. Naturally, I'd want him to be as well off as possible at the time of the divorce, in order to increase my settlement."

"Exactly," Amelia agreed.

"I never knew you were such a suspicious old witch, Amelia," Janet said pleasantly. "I can see where Ron gets it."

Shayne swung toward the fair-haired man. "What about you, Patten? Got anything to say?"

Patten's face was stiff. He didn't seem to believe what he was hearing. "I had nothing to do with this, I promise you," he said. "I'm just —"

"Just intending to marry my daughter," Amelia interrupted him. "You'd like to get half of the company under your control, wouldn't you, William? I can't blame you for that, but if you're the one who's trying to dispose of me, I wish you had chosen a less violent way to take over."

The air seemed to crackle with the angry denials coming from the two men and two women. That anger was directed for the most part at Amelia, for daring to think that among them could be a killer, but Shayne was coming in for his share of dirty looks, too. He shrugged them off and pointed a finger.

"What about Braddock?" he asked, indicating the servant. "You didn't mention him. Is there a motive there, too?"

Amelia looked up at Braddock, and a slight smile curved her thin lips. "Braddock and I have been together for many, many years, Mr. Shayne. He and my husband were in the Army together. I have absolutely no belief that Braddock would do any harm to anyone, let alone me."

There seemed to be a trace of a smile on Braddock's face. He said, "Thank you, Mrs. Darington."

"So it looks like you've got four suspects, shamus," Ron said with a sneer. The effect was ruined by the way he jumped when a fresh sheet of rain pelted against the window suddenly, accompanied by the ever-

present howl of the wind. After a moment to recover his composure, Ron went on, "What do you intend to do, beat a confession out of one of us?"

"I don't think that will be necessary," Shayne answered with a grin. "I hope I can come up with enough solid evidence to hang the attempted murderer good and proper."

"By all means, go right ahead with your investigation," Amelia said. "We need something to keep our minds off this dreadful storm."

Shayne glanced around at them. They were arranged in a loose circle around Amelia, Ron and Janet on opposite sides, glaring at each other whenever Ron wasn't turning an angry expression on Shayne. Lois was making an effort to look unconcerned again, but she wasn't succeeding very well. Patten still looked a little surprised and baffled by the whole thing, and Shayne didn't really blame him, assuming he was innocent, that is. If he was, then it must have seemed like a really strange way to spend an evening, riding out a hurricane and possibly being accused of a murder at the same time. Braddock and Amelia seemed to be the only unperturbed ones in the bunch. She was sitting calmly in her wheelchair, while Braddock was standing unobtrusively behind her.

After another quick look at the fury of the hurricane outside and a moment's worried thought about Lucy, Shayne looked at the six of them and said, "Well, let's get to work and find that killer while he's still a would-be one."

IV

"THE FIRST THING I'D LIKE TO DO is search the apartment," Shayne went on. "If someone here did take a shot at you, it's pretty likely that the gun is still here somewhere."

"Absolutely not!" Ron exclaimed before his mother had a chance to respond. "I won't have some snooping private eye pawing through my things. I just won't have it."

Amelia looked intently at her son. "This is still my apartment," she said levelly. "A respect for privacy is one thing, but attempted murder is another, Ron. I have no objection to Mr. Shayne searching the rooms."

Shayne looked around at the others. "What about the rest of you?" he asked.

Janet tossed her blonde hair and said, "I've got nothing to hide, Mr. Shayne. You can poke around all you want, as far as I'm concerned."

"It's all right with me," Lois said quietly. She was standing next to Patten who slipped an arm around her as she looked out at the storm

and shivered. Patten said nothing, but Shayne hadn't expected him to, since he didn't live there. If he was the one who was trying to kill Amelia, though, it was possible he could have concealed the weapon somewhere in the apartment, just like any of the rest of them.

Shayne looked over at Braddock and asked him, "Do you know if there's a flashlight around here?"

"I believe there's one out in the kitchen, sir. I'll get it for you."

It took the butler only a moment to fetch the flashlight. As he handed it over, Shayne glanced at the other occupants of the room again. Everyone was watching him with anxious looks on their faces, but that could have been caused by several reasons. Worry over the storm, uneasiness about being suspected of the attempt on Amelia's life, or a combination of the two. But Shayne would have been willing to bet that at least one of them was afraid of what a search might turn up.

Shayne took Braddock aside and got the butler to give him the layout of the place quickly. Braddock told him who belonged in which bedroom, and Shayne thanked him with a nod. Then he snapped the flashlight on and said to the others, "I'll be back in a few minutes."

He went down the hall, checking out first a closet that contained several jackets and raincoats. There was no sign of a gun anywhere, or anything else out of the ordinary.

The first bedroom he came to belonged to Ron and Janet, according to Braddock. Shayne started going through it quickly but thoroughly, checking the clothes in the big closet, the drawers of the antique dresser, any place big enough to conceal a pistol. He was just about finished with the room, having turned up nothing, when he sensed a presence behind him.

SHAYNE SWUNG, BRINGING THE HEAVY FLASHLIGHT UP to use as a weapon if he had to. Its beam flickered over a lovely face and blond hair, and Janet Darington gasped, "It's only me, Mr. Shayne! It's only me."

Shayne's muscles, tensed automatically in reaction to the possible threat, relaxed a little, but not much. His gray eyes scanned her rapidly, saw that she held no weapon of any sort, and then lifted to give her a puzzled look.

"What are you doing here, Mrs. Darington?" he asked. "I thought you were all going to stay together."

"You didn't tell us we had to do that," Janet replied softly. "I thought it would be much more interesting to watch a detective at work than to stand around with that bunch in there. Besides, I'm hoping that

your company will take my mind off the storm. It's got me awfully worried."

"None of us like it," Shayne grunted. "I think it would be better if you went back into the living room with the others, though."

"Have you found the gun yet? I'm sure it was Ron who tried to kill Amelia. Mother love wouldn't mean any more to him than any other kind, and he needs money. He started a business of his own last year, but it didn't make it."

Shayne ignored the question about the gun, while filing away the information she had given him. He reached out with his free hand and put it on her arm to steer her toward the bedroom door. "Like I said, I think you'd better —"

She didn't want to be steered. Before Shayne could stop her, she had stepped closer to him. Her proudly-thrusting breasts brushed against his chest as she tilted her head up and said, "I really do need something to keep my mind off the hurricane."

Her arms went around him, and she pressed against him hotly. Shayne didn't pull away as she found his lips with hers. Her mouth worked against his hungrily, lips opening and tongue darting between them.

Shayne didn't return the embrace. He was just as glad he hadn't when the bedroom door opened again and Ron Darington exclaimed, "Janet! My God, even now, with all this other going on?"

Janet broke the kiss and took a hasty step backward, away from Shayne. Ron surged angrily across the room, snapping at Shayne, "Telling lies and poking into our private lives isn't enough for you, is it, Shayne? You want my wife, too!"

"You're mistaken," Shayne replied calmly.

"I found her in your arms!" Ron blazed.

"She put herself there."

Shayne had the flashlight pointed at the ceiling now, and in its indirect glow, he could see the grimace of rage distorting Ron's face. Ron's hands clenched into fists, and one of them started toward Shayne's face.

Shayne dodged the punch, wearily accepting the fact that he was going to have to fight Ron again. Before he had to defend himself, though, there was a rush of feet from the open door, and Braddock loomed up behind Ron, grabbing his arms and holding him back.

"Mr. Darington!" the butler said sharply. "There's no need for that. Come along now." He tugged at Ron, none too gently. Shayne saw how easily Braddock was handling the young man, despite the age difference, and he couldn't help but be impressed.

Shayne shot a glance at Janet and said, "Get on back out there. We sure as hell don't need anymore problems than we've already got."

As she started to follow her husband and Braddock, Ron jerked his head around and barked at Shayne, "You haven't heard the last of this, snooper."

Shayne ignored him, choosing instead to send a grateful look toward Braddock. The servant acknowledged it with a momentary lift of the eyebrows, and then he was skillfully manipulating Ron out of the room.

It didn't take long to finish that part of the search then. Shayne didn't find anything unusual in Ron and Janet's room, and he moved on to the next one down the hall, hearing the muffled sound of voices coming from the living room as he went out into the corridor. He could still faintly hear the howl of the wind, too, and it wasn't a pleasant sound. He was beginning to be surprised that the big picture window was holding up under the strain.

The next room was Lois's. Shayne would have been able to tell that, even if Braddock hadn't already given him the information. The furnishings had an air of glamorous femininity about them, without going overboard on frills and lace, much like Lois herself. She projected an aura of sophistication, but Shayne had seen the way the storm brought out the little girl underneath that cool exterior.

He had been in her room for nearly five minutes when he found the gun.

IT WAS UNDER A STACK OF SILKEN NIGHTWEAR in a drawer, not a very good hiding place as far as he was concerned. Shayne felt the hard shape of it first, then used one of the negligees to pick it up carefully, hoping to preserve any fingerprints that might be on it. He wrapped the silk around the butt, bringing the barrel into view. Holding the barrel under his nose, he sniffed it. There was no doubt about it in his mind. The pistol had been fired recently, and whoever had fired it had not had time to clean it. A moment later, still looking through the drawer, Shayne found the silencer that had probably been used with the gun earlier, also concealed under silk.

He gave a mental shrug. Under normal circumstances, he had enough evidence right here to crack the case. He could have hauled the gun and all the suspects down to police headquarters and let Chief Will Gentry's lab boys drive the nails in the coffin. They could determine for sure if this gun had fired the slug Shayne had recovered from the wall. He didn't doubt that; the caliber was the same; he had noticed that right away. And after proving that this was the gun that had fired the

near-fatal shot, paraffin tests could tell which one of the suspects had fired a gun in the recent past. Yeah, simple enough . . . under normal circumstances.

Only these circumstances were anything but normal. With Hurricane Livia moving through, the cops wouldn't have time for such things. In a murder case, maybe, but this was only attempted murder, so far.

Shayne's mouth stretched in a grin. He was on his own, for the moment, which had always been the way he preferred it anyway. Now that he had the gun, maybe the one who had fired it would crack. Maybe not. But Shayne was ready to do a little pushing along the way to speed up that cracking.

He started to turn, and the door into the room opened. Shayne looked up, the gun still visible in his hand. He caught a flash of movement, but before the light could pick out the face of the newcomer, something slammed into Shayne's wrist and sent the flashlight spinning away.

Shayne whipped to one side, rightly expecting another blow to follow right on the heels of the first. The attacker stumbled past him, and Shayne whipped a leg out, spilling the man. His assailant was male, Shayne had been able to tell that much, but since the three older men in the apartment all had on suits, he couldn't identify which one it was.

Whirling, Shayne crouched and was ready when the man righted himself and charged again. The flashlight was over in a corner, its beam shining under the bed and not giving off enough light for Shayne to see anything except a moving shape in the shadows. He picked up a fist coming at him, blocked it with the arm that held the gun, and sent a punch of his own whistling to the other man's midsection.

The man gasped and staggered backwards, and Shayne followed him, ready to press his advantage. A crash of glass from somewhere outside the room made him stop in his tracks.

His first thought was of the huge plate glass window in the living room. He had expected the force of the wind and the rain to shatter it before now. Shayne started to turn instinctively toward the door.

The other man plowed into him, smashing him back and down with a flying tackle. Shayne felt the pistol slip from his fingers. He grabbed for it, but the other man reached it first. Shayne tried to jerk his head to the side. The movement was just a little bit too late.

The barrel caught him on the temple, not a hard blow, but enough to make fireworks explode behind Shayne's eyes. The room was dark to start with, but it got a whole lot darker all of a sudden. Shayne felt consciousness slipping away from him, and he tried to catch it and pull

it back. His hold on it caught, slipped, caught again.

By the time he had fought the blackness and dizziness off and gotten control of his senses again, he knew that several minutes had passed. How long, he wasn't sure. But it didn't really matter. Whoever had jumped him had already accomplished his goal.

The gun was gone, and no matter how much Shayne looked for it after he retrieved the flashlight, he wouldn't find it. He was certain of that.

He was right.

Shayne touched the rapidly-rising lump on his head gingerly, and then went out to the living room again, to confront the storm and his roomful of suspects.

V

THE PICTURE WINDOW WASN'T BROKEN AFTER ALL. That was the first thing Shayne noticed when he entered the room. Everyone seemed to be gathered around a low coffee table, and Shayne could hear the static-laden sound of a radio announcer talking about the storm. He saw a transistor radio sitting on the table. Battery power looked like it would be the only thing available for a while.

Shayne paused. They all seemed to be concentrating on the radio. No one was paying any attention to him. He had intended on telling all of them about the gun and the clout on the head he had taken, but as he considered the situation, he decided to keep quiet about it for the moment. That way, his assailant might slip up and say or do something to give himself away.

"What's the news about the storm?" he asked, making Lois and Janet jump in surprise.

"The eye will moving inland momentarily," Amelia answered. "The authorities have decided that it's going to be worse than they predicted. They're advising everyone that's still here to seek high ground, but to stay out of buildings like this one."

Shayne glanced out the window. It was almost as black as night outside, and with the power failure, there was nothing to be seen beyond the glass except the rain pelting it. It was almost as if they weren't in downtown Miami at all.

"I thought I heard glass breaking a little while ago," Shayne said.

"That was me," Lois said. "I guess I was just clumsy. I dropped a glass on the table."

"You were just nervous," her mother told her. "We all are. We'd be fools if we weren't."

Shayne strolled over closer to the table, lighting a cigarette and listening to the grim news coming over the radio. There was already extensive flooding in the area, and much damage from the high winds, and the worst was still to come, according to the weather forecasters. Shayne's thoughts went to Lucy again. In the back of his mind, he was kicking himself for getting involved with this Darington business in the first place. Lucy had been frightened when he left her, and he couldn't blame her. He felt sure she would be all right in his apartment, but he would have felt a lot better if he were there with her.

It was unlikely he could get there now, though, even if the elevator had been working. Many of the streets would be flooded, and the rain was falling harder all the time. He expected that Lucy would have called the police by now, but they wouldn't be coming for a while, if at all. There was just too much else going on.

That left him with time on his hands and a case to solve. The knock on the head had just made it that much more personal. He caught Braddock's eye and motioned with his head. The butler came over to him and asked in a low voice, "Yes, sir, what is it?"

"I'd like to see your room now, Braddock," Shayne said. "If you don't mind, that is."

Braddock opened his mouth to reply, but before he could, Amelia rolled up beside them. She said, "What is it, Mr. Shayne? What do you have on your mind?"

"Mr. Shayne was just asking my permission to search my room, ma'am," Braddock said, and Ron Darington was close enough to overhear.

"I don't recall you asking anyone else's permission, Shayne," he snapped. "You just barged in."

"I asked your mother's permission," Shayne said tightly, his patience about at an end where Ron was concerned.

"And I gave it," Amelia said. "But there's no need for you to search Braddock's room. I told you, I don't suspect him."

"Maybe not, but whoever did take the shot at you could have stashed the gun in Braddock's room, right?"

"It's all right with me if Mr. Shayne takes a look through my room," Braddock said. "I don't mind at all."

Amelia shrugged. "In that case . . . Go ahead, Mr. Shayne. Search as much as you like. You can look through my room too, if you want to, but I was in there most of the time after I called you until you got here."

"I'll take a look through Braddock's room first," Shayne said.

"It's on the other side of the kitchen," Braddock told him. Shayne

nodded and started in that direction, knowing that the apartment wasn't so large that he could lose his way.

It was a neat room, Shayne saw as he swung the door open and flashed the light around. A place for everything and everything in its place, he supposed. He wasn't surprised; Braddock struck him as a meticulous man.

But neatness didn't have a thing to do with murder. Shayne started searching.

HE NO LONGER EXPECTED TO FIND THE GUN. If it had been Braddock who stashed the gun in Lois's room and then struggled with him in the darkness, then the last thing the butler would have done would be to bring the pistol back here to his own room. Unless he was trying to cross Shayne up . . . Braddock had made no objection when Shayne asked to search his room, had seemed almost eager to have the big detective do whatever he wanted, in fact. That could have just been a front; Shayne had known other killers to assume an attitude of cooperation, just to cover their trail.

A simple chest in a corner was next, and Shayne found that it contained mostly clothing and other odds and ends. It was only when he reached the bottom drawer that he turned up something interesting.

It was a good-sized manila envelope, thick with papers or photographs inside it, and reinforced by a piece of cardboard, from the feel of it. It wasn't sealed. A simple clasp held it shut. He undid it, lifted the flap, and let the contents slide out into his hand, feeling a little bit like an intruder but curious nonetheless.

Shayne scanned quickly through the things that had been in the envelope. There was a photograph, a 5 X 8 black-and-white shot of two men in uniform, standing next to each other and smiling. They both looked familiar. Shayne flipped it over and found scrawled on the back, *Lieutenants Darington and Braddock, 1947.*

He frowned as he turned the picture over and looked at it again. His free hand came up and pulled on his earlobe. He could recognize Braddock now, and he knew why the other man had looked familiar. There was a strong resemblance between him and his daughter, Lois. Not much resemblance to Ron at all, though . . .

An official-looking document caught his eye. It was a discharge paper from the Army, acknowledging that one Benjamin Braddock had been discharged honorably from the Army in 1948 with the rank of Lieutenant. Immediately beneath it in the stack of papers was another certificate. Shayne glanced at it and had to repress a sudden whistle.

It stated that Lieutenant Braddock had achieved the highest possible

rating as a marksman while stationed at Fort Hood, Texas. With the certificate were some yellowed newspaper clippings about the Army pistol team, led by Braddock, that had captured the trophy in every competition it entered.

There were other newspaper clippings, but they were all about the Darington family. Braddock must have gone to work for them right after being discharged from the service, because there were clippings concerning the wedding of Gregory Darington and Amelia Fairchild, evidently *the* social event of 1948. Another one proclaimed the birth of Ron Darington in 1949. There were other clippings about the growth of the Darington fortune over the intervening years, and also about the death of Gregory Darington after a bout with cancer. Shayne could see the pattern — the servant who is an old friend of the family as well, wrapping himself up in their lives at the expense of his own.

Would a man like that try to kill a woman he had served for over thirty years?

Shayne was going to find out.

HE REPLACED THE CONTENTS OF THE ENVELOPE and put it back in the drawer. Straightening, he strode purposefully out of the room and back through the kitchen and dining room to the living room, where everyone was still listening to the radio.

If anything, the wind was stronger, Shayne thought. He could still feel the building shivering under his feet from time to time, and the times were becoming more frequent. If the storm got much worse, they would have to give some thought to trying to get out of the penthouse, elevator or no elevator.

William Patten looked up from where he was standing behind Lois's chair, his hands on her shoulders, and saw Shayne. He said, "The eye's come ashore now, north of here, just like they predicted. But the winds are up to 160 miles per hour, and they didn't expect that."

Shayne's mouth tightened. He said, "It better not get much worse, or we're going to be in trouble. I've ridden them out at 150, but never above that."

"This is a good strong building," Amelia said flatly. "We'll be just fine." Shayne wasn't sure who she was trying to convince.

"Could I see you privately, Mrs. Darington?" he asked her. "I've got a few more questions."

Amelia looked around at her family. "I think you can say anything to me that you have to say right here, Mr. Shayne."

"I'd rather keep this private for right now," Shayne insisted.

"If you don't mind."

"Very well." Amelia touched the controls on her wheelchair and sent it rolling toward Shayne.

They went down the hall to the dining room. Shayne could still hear the sounds coming from the radio, but he didn't think they would be overheard if they talked quietly here. Unless someone slipped down the hall in the gloom to eavesdrop: . . .

He would take that chance. He said to Amelia, "I need to know a couple of things. First, while I was searching the rooms the first time, were you all together in the living room, or were some of the others in and out of the room?"

"I think we were all together, for the most part," she replied. "We're all interested in the hurricane, of course, and after Braddock brought his transistor radio from the kitchen, all of us stayed close to listen to it." She frowned as she thought about Shayne's question. "I believe that several of the others were out of the room for short periods, though. A situation like this can make a stomach . . . nervous."

That was understating it, Shayne knew. It was enough to make anybody just plain sick. That was the answer he had been expecting, though. With everyone worried about the storm, someone could have slipped in and out of the room with a good chance of not being noticed. Shayne knew that one person had done just that.

"You said there was something else you need to know?"

"That's right. You may not want to answer this, but what exactly are the terms of your will?"

Amelia looked shocked. "I don't understand. Why do you need to know that, Mr. Shayne? We discussed the fact that Ron and Lois will inherit my estate equally —"

"You never came out and said that," Shayne reminded her. "Anyway, I'm more interested in any special bequests you might have made, over and above what your children inherit."

"Well, there's only one. I've left something for Braddock, since he's been with the family for so long and since he was a friend of my husband and myself, even before I married my husband."

"And how much is the something you've left him?"

Amelia looked reluctant. She hesitated for a long moment, then finally said, "One hundred thousand dollars. Not a tremendous amount, really, when you consider the value of the rest of the estate."

"But a hell of a lot to a man who's been a servant all of his life," Shayne said. "Let's go back into the living room, Mrs. Darington. I've got a few things to say to the group."

Amelia shook her head and snapped, "I know what you're thinking, but you're wrong. Braddock would never harm me! I know he wouldn't. I just know it."

Shayne inclined his head. "Maybe you're right. Let's go see what he has to say, though."

HE STRODE DOWN THE HALL, AND A SECOND LATER, Amelia sent her chair whirring after him. As they emerged into the living room, five pairs of eyes turned to look at them. Shayne's gaze went around the group, studying the faces in the candlelight, and then came to rest on Braddock, standing in the background with his usual diffident expression.

Lightning flickered in the sky outside, throwing a silver-blue glow over the room for an instant, and Shayne said, "I think I've found out who's been trying to kill Mrs. Darington."

Amelia interrupted, "I tell you, you're wrong, Mr. Shayne. Braddock would never —"

"Braddock!" Ron exclaimed. "You think Braddock is behind these so-called murder attempts?"

Shayne nodded. "I do. What about it, Braddock?"

It was hard to tell in this light, but Shayne thought the butler had gone pale. His face was tight and strained as he said, "I assure you, sir, that I had no part —"

"You stand to inherit a big chunk of money if Mrs. Darington dies," Shayne cut in. "You were a marksman in the Army, especially good with a handgun. That was a long time ago, though. You'd still be very familiar with a pistol, but a miss isn't impossible, even for a marksman. You had plenty of chances to tamper with the brakes of the car, too, since you're the one who drives it all the time. And you could have done the switch with the medicine."

"But Braddock was in the car when the brakes failed," Janet objected. The subject of the discussion was still standing to the side, looking pained and stunned by Shayne's accusation. Too stunned to defend himself, Shayne wondered?

"It could be that the brakes went out before Braddock meant for them to," Shayne said in answer to Janet's comment. "I don't imagine you've had a lot of experience sabotaging cars, have you, Braddock?"

"This — this is rubbish!" Braddock finally burst out. "I can't imagine you're serious. I'd never try to hurt Mrs. Darington."

"Of course you wouldn't," Lois told him. She swung her face toward Shayne. "You're all wrong, Mr. Shayne. Braddock's been around longer than I have. He's just like a member of the family."

Shayne was adamant. "I'll stand by what I've said. And the gun I found would have been enough to prove it."

"What gun?" Ron asked sarcastically. "I still think this whole thing is a crock."

"The gun Braddock used earlier," Shayne said. "The gun he hid in Lois's room —"

"In my room?" Lois gasped. "You found a gun in my room? Where is it?"

"I wish I knew," Shayne answered. "I'm sure of who fired it, though."

BRADDOCK WAS STILL SHAKING HIS HEAD and looking stubborn now, but Shayne could tell he had made inroads with the others, especially with his mention of the gun. Janet and Lois were looking from Shayne to Braddock now, and there was doubt on their faces. Ron was still trying to look properly disbelieving, but Shayne could see the furtive glances he was shooting at the butler, as if he was trying to size up the truth of the accusation. And William Patten looked the most convinced of all. He took a step toward Shayne and exclaimed, "If Braddock's the one who fired the shot, then he must have been the one who sneaked up on you and took the gun away from you, too!"

Shayne's head jerked around, his brow furrowing and grim lines appearing around his mouth. His smile as he looked at William Patten made the vice-president of Darington Enterprises stop in his tracks. "Maybe you'd like to explain that, Patten," Shayne suggested softly.

Patten glanced around wildly for a second, and then he leaped at Shayne, fists swinging.

VI

SHAYNE BLOCKED ONE OF PATTEN'S PUNCHES with his left arm, stepped inside of the other one, and brought his bunched right fist up, clipping the young man on the point of the chin. A hard left slammed into Patten's solar plexus, and suddenly the fight had gone out of him. He sagged against Shayne for a moment, until the big redhead pushed him away.

Lois sprang forward, taking Shayne by surprise. Her hand whipped around, cracking across his face in a hard slap. Shayne's mouth twisted in a grimace, and he caught her wrist before she could strike him again. He said, "Hold it! There's no call for all this."

"You should have thought of that before you started accusing everybody in sight, Shayne," Ron sneered.

Lois hissed, "You bastard! How dare you say that William had anything to do with this awful business?"

"I don't recall saying that," Shayne answered, watching the ashen-faced Patten as he stood unsteadily a few feet away. "I just asked him to explain that last comment of his. I'd like to know how he found out that someone jumped me and took the gun, when I hadn't said anything about that part yet."

"We all know what you meant," Amelia said. "It's fairly obvious." She turned her wheelchair to face Patten. "William, I want to know about this. Was it you who attacked Mr. Shayne in Lois's room?"

Patten looked around at all of them. The accusations of a few moments before against Braddock seemed to be forgotten now. He stammered, "I — I guess I'm just not any good at this. I'm sorry, Mr. Shayne. I didn't mean to hurt you. I just wanted to get that gun away from you."

Shayne's mind was racing, and he asked quickly, "How did you know I'd find it in Lois's room? Did you put it there?"

"No! My God, I'd never try to hurt Amelia. She's my boss, and she's going to be my mother-in-law. I want you to find out who's been trying to kill her as much as any of the rest of us. But when I saw you turn around with that gun in your hand . . . I guess I just panicked. All I thought about was that you had found it in Lois's room, and I couldn't bear to see her in trouble. I just wanted to get the gun to protect her. I only came into that room in the first place to keep an eye on you while you searched it."

Lois was staring at Patten, her eyes wide. "You . . . you thought I was the one trying to kill Mother?" She was incredulous, but her amazement quickly turned to anger. "You just made that assumption? How could you? I . . . I . . . You . . ."

Shayne felt what little control he had of this situation starting to slip away. The wheels of his brain had been clicking over as Patten spoke, and he found that he believed the young man. What he said made sense, considering the way he felt about Lois.

"Let's all take it easy," Shayne said. "I think I buy your story, Patten, at least for now. But you're going to have to answer some questions, Lois. For starters, do you know how that gun got into your room?"

She shook her head, her features still furious, her fear of the storm gone in the heat of the moment. "I don't know a damn thing about any of it!" she snapped. "I certainly didn't put it there. If I had, I'd know right where you found it, and I don't have the slightest idea!" The anger on her face was replaced by a look of speculation. "You sure do

change suspects fast, Mr. Shayne. A minute ago, you said Braddock was the would-be killer. I still don't believe that for a second, but if it was true, couldn't he have hidden the gun in my room?"

"I most certainly did not, Miss Lois," Braddock told her. "I wouldn't do anything to hurt any of the Daringtons."

Shayne wasn't sure of that. Despite what had happened in the last few minutes, Braddock was still the number one suspect, as far as he was concerned. The butler could have easily hidden the gun in Lois's room, as she herself had suggested.

Turning toward Patten again, Shayne asked sharply, "What did you do with the gun after you took it away from me?"

"It's gone," Patten said simply. "I dropped it down the garbage chute that leads to the basement. I thought I'd slip down there sometime after this storm is over and retrieve it, so that I could get rid of it permanently."

Shayne tried not to show the disgust he felt. For now, the gun was gone, all right. The twenty floors between penthouse and elevator might as well have been twenty miles as long as they were stuck up here. He felt an angry response coming up his throat, and he knew he couldn't stop it.

The crash of splintering glass stopped it for him.

THIS TIME IT WAS THE PICTURE WINDOW, bursting under the constant buffeting of the wind and rain. Janet screamed as it shattered. Shards of glass flew across the room, and the wind shrieked through the newly-made opening, hurling the rain before it.

Shayne bit back a curse and grabbed Amelia's wheelchair. She seemed to be frozen in place, stunned by the sudden eruption of violence, and he pushed her to the far side of the room, as far away from the shattered window as possible.

Ron was looking down at his hand. There was a trickle of bright red on it, where a piece of flying glass had cut him, and he let out a low moan as he stared at the blood. Shayne thought he was going to pass out. He took Ron's arm roughly and thrust him toward his mother.

"Everybody stay away from the window!" Shayne yelled over the roar of the wind. Patten had his arms around Lois, and they were moving toward the far wall, huddling against each other. Janet stood where she was, face composed. When Shayne looked closer at her, he saw how very close she was to hysterics.

"Get her to the other side of the room," he said to Braddock, voice low enough that only the butler heard now. Braddock took her arm gently.

"Come with me, Miss Janet," he said. "I'm sure it'll be all right."

Shayne wasn't sure of that at all. He heard a new noise and looked up. The ceiling was wet, and he knew that a great deal of water must have collected up there. It was coming down much too fast for any drainage system to keep up with it. That meant the roof of the penthouse was in danger of collapsing.

Shayne faced the group. There was no question of who was in charge now. They turned to him instinctively, knowing that he was their best chance of getting out of this alive.

"We've got to get out of this penthouse," Shayne rapped. "It's a deathtrap in conditions like this. Everybody into the anteroom."

They all went unquestioningly, making the small anteroom a crowded place as Shayne made his way through it to the elevator doors. He studied them for a long moment, then said, "We've got to get these open. Lend me a hand here."

Pressing his fingers into the crack where the doors came together, Shayne strained against them. Braddock stepped forward and took hold of the doors, too, as best he could. It was hard to get a grip in the crack, with barely enough room for fingers once the rubber gaskets were pushed back. He and Shayne heaved together on them.

The doors popped open.

"Hold them!" Shayne barked. Braddock braced himself and kept the doors open. Patten stepped into the opening, too, and leaned against one side of them. Shayne moved on into the elevator and looked up at the ceiling of it.

"There's a trapdoor up there, all right," he grunted. "That's going to be our way out. Hang onto those doors."

Moving quickly, Shayne went back into the living room and took hold of a big armchair. He dragged it through the anteroom and shoved it into the opening between the elevator doors. Braddock and Patten moved out of the way, letting the chair hold the doors open.

Shayne had cast a glance through the broken window when he was in the living room, and he didn't like what he saw. The terrace just outside the window was awash with water, and there was a spreading wet stain on the ceiling. The plaster up there would be softening and giving way. And the rain was still coming down in buckets outside.

HE TOLD HIMSELF NOT TO THINK ABOUT WHAT MIGHT happen, though, to just take this operation one step at a time. The elevator car was small enough that he could stand on the chair in the opening and reach the trapdoor in the ceiling. He pushed it back, exposing a shallow space above the car.

"We're going up there," Shayne told the group, who were all watching him anxiously. "Then we can slip down beside the car to the floor below. Are there stairs down from there?"

"There are," Amelia said. "A very daring plan, Mr. Shayne. And it may well work. For some of us."

Shayne gave her a fleeting grin. "Don't worry, we won't forget about you. We'll have to rig some sort of sling, but we can do it."

Amelia smiled back at him. "You don't believe in giving up, do you, Mr. Shayne?"

Shayne shook his head and almost felt like laughing for one mad moment. Giving up was something he didn't like at all.

"I'll check this out," he said. "Be back in a minute."

Grasping the sides of the trapdoor, he pulled himself up lithely, sliding into the tight confines of the space above the car. It was tight for him, but he was larger than any of the others, and it looked like he could make it. There wouldn't be any trouble with the others, except for Amelia. Shayne crawled the few feet to the side of the car, looking down past it. There was enough room on the sides, too, though it would be a tight squeeze and they would all be pretty greasy when they got through. But the drop to the bottom of the shaft was a short one, only to the floor below, and they could all handle that. He didn't see any reason his plan couldn't work.

Providing that a stormy lady named Livia cooperated and didn't get any worse for a few more minutes.

Shayne dropped back down through the trapdoor and said to them, "All right. Let's get at it."

Ron and Janet balked, their fear taking over now and freezing them in their tracks, white-faced. Shayne gave them an exasperated look and turned to Lois and Patten. "You two go first," he said. "It's not hard. Just up through the trapdoor, over to the side of the car, and down the side. There are places you can get handholds, and then you'll only have to drop about five or six feet."

Lois was clutching Patten. She shook her head. "I'm scared," she said, her voice quavering.

"Hell, we all are," Shayne told her quietly. "But we can't stay here."

Patten squeezed her arm. "Come on, Lois," he said. "We can do it."

His words did more good than Shayne's. Lois stepped up onto the chair and into the car, Patten following right behind. Shayne and Patten gave her a boose, and Patten scrambled up after her.

"You're next," Shayne snapped at Ron and Janet.

Janet swallowed. She was terrified, that was plain to see, but she found some courage somewhere inside and came into the car. Shayne helped her up. He could hear Lois and Patten bumping around at the side of the car, and then felt a slight vibration. Patten's voice came floating into the car from below, almost drowned out by the continuing howl of the wind.

"We made it!" Patten called out. "We're all right!"

Janet was on top of the car now, and she glanced back down inside it. Shayne gave her the high sign, and she managed a tiny smile for him. She moved away from the trapdoor, out of his view.

RON WAS STILL STANDING ROOTED TO THE FLOOR, too scared to move. Shayne felt his anger boiling up again, but before he could explode, Braddock stepped up beside Ron and took his arm. "You can do it," Braddock said sincerely. "Go on, Ron. You have to get out of here. It's not safe here anymore."

Ron shook his head, coming out of his fear-induced trance. He took a deep breath, then stepped over the chair into the elevator. Shayne made a stirrup with his hands and Ron stepped into it, reaching up and grabbing the sides of the trapdoor as Shayne thrust him upwards. He heaved, and his feet were the last thing Shayne saw as he disappeared through the door.

Shayne looked over at Braddock then, a frown on his face. He had been watching as Braddock prodded Ron into making the effort to escape the storm's fury, and something that had been nagging at the back of his brain had suddenly exploded into crystal clarity.

There was no time to worry about it now, though. He said to Braddock, "Now we've got to make a sling for Mrs. Darington. Have you got some rope up here, or some nylon cord?"

"I know just the thing," Braddock said. "It will only take a moment to rip up a sheet. I'm afraid we don't have any rope or cord."

"That'll do," Shayne nodded. "Go to it."

As Braddock hurried out of the anteroom, Shayne followed him as far as the door to the living room. Everything in there was soaked now, as the wind-driven rain was coming clear across the room. Shayne shook his head. He was fairly confident that they had acted in time and would be able to get to the lower floors of the building, but he was glad they hadn't waited any longer than they had.

Amelia said from behind him, "I'm getting to be an old woman, you know. You and Braddock could leave me here."

Shayne turned around. "No need for that. We'll get you down all right." He smiled at her. "Besides, I don't think Braddock would leave

the mother of his son up here to die."

VII

AMELIA'S MOUTH DROPPED OPEN IN SHOCK. Shayne's statement was enough of a bombshell to make both of them forget about the storm for a moment. He was putting it into words for the first time. The theory had sprung into his mind a few moments before, when he was watching Braddock and Ron, and now as he spoke, he could see that it made sense.

"I — I don't know what you're talking about," Amelia said haltingly. "Braddock and I —"

"This is no time for covering up," Shayne said. "I could see the resemblance right away, as soon as I stopped letting what I had been told get in the way. Braddock was just the old family retainer, that's the way the story goes, but it's not necessarily all of the story. He was also a friend of your husband's in the Army, and a friend of yours before your marriage as well, you said. He didn't come from the upper crust like you and your husband, though, so once you got married, he went back to his place and you and your husband went to yours. Braddock went to work for you and made a loyal, trustworthy servant, the best you could have found anywhere. And he never said a word about the fling you and he had just before the marriage."

Shayne was filling in the blanks in the story with guesswork, but he would have been willing to bet that he was mostly right. Amelia was shaking her head, though, intent on denying what he was saying. "Why, that's ridiculous!" she said. "Where did you ever get that idea, Mr. Shayne?"

"I saw the photograph and the newspaper clippings with all the dates in Braddock's room. He kept the clipping about Ron's birth, but there wasn't one there about Lois. Now that I think about it, there wasn't much about Lois in any of the clippings, or about your husband. Just you and Ron. You had two families in one, didn't you, Amelia?"

"There's no point in denying it," Braddock said from behind Shayne. "You've guessed too well, Mr. Shayne. I suppose sentimental old fools shouldn't keep newspaper clippings around."

Shayne looked over his shoulder, half-expecting to see a gun in Braddock's hand. Instead, there was only a makeshift harness fashioned out of torn bed sheets. Braddock moved past Shayne and bent over Amelia. "I think this will work, Amelia. We'll get you out of here now."

She looked up at him, a sad, faraway look on her face. "I'm sorry,

Ben," she said, in such low tones that Shayne could barely hear them. "I've made us both pretend for so many years. And we could have had so much together, since Greg died"

"It's too late to worry about that now," Braddock told her. "Now, let's get this sling on you." His voice was competent and, for the moment, emotionless.

"Does Ron know?" Shayne asked as Braddock got the harness on Amelia.

"I think he must," Braddock said over his shoulder. "He was counting on the fact that I'm his father to keep me quiet, I think."

Shayne had already begun to see the light, and Braddock's words clinched it for him. "Ron was behind the murder attempts, wasn't he?"

BRADDOCK IGNORED AMELIA'S SURPRISED OUTCRY at Shayne's question. She had been cold enough about it earlier, when she was laying out the motives they all had for wanting her dead, but now it was different, when she heard her son being discussed by as a would-be killer by Shayne and Braddock.

"I'm sure he was," Braddock said. "The gun that was used earlier this evening was a .32, and I'm certain it was one that was stolen from my room several weeks ago. Ron was here when it disappeared; he had the opportunity to take it. It worried me, but I was willing to give him the benefit of the doubt then. But he also had the opportunity to switch Amelia's medicine, and he had the car out the day before the brakes went out. It was all coincidental, and I wouldn't accuse him on the basis of what I suspected, but this today is too much. To have taken a shot at his own mother like that and then to hide the gun in his sister's room . . ." Braddock shook his head, and Shayne could see the pain on his face and hear it in his voice now. "It's just too much. When this storm is over, I'm going to help you and the police all I can, Mr. Shayne. There must be some proof. I know why he wants the money now. He needs his inheritance if he's ever going to recoup his losses from when his business failed."

Amelia was shaking her head. She said brokenly, "You can't . . . He's your son . . . You can't betray him, no matter what he tried to do to me —"

"It's no betrayal," Braddock said sharply. "I'm sorry, Amelia. I love the boy, you know that, but he is what he is, regardless of how much we love him."

"Damn, what a touching scene," Ron said from the elevator.

SHAYNE WHIRLED. RON CHARGED OUT of the elevator, vaulting the chair holding the doors open and plowing into Shayne in a flying tackle. He was covered with grease from the elevator shaft, and as the collision bore them both to the floor, Shayne tried to get a grip on him and failed. His fingers slipped right off.

Ron brought a knee up viciously. Shayne twisted and took it on the thigh. Ron's hand darted under his coat and came out holding a small clasp knife. Not much of a weapon, but at close quarters, it could be deadly.

Shayne heaved upwards with all his strength, throwing Ron off him and rolling away, trying to get a little fighting room. They both surged to their feet at the same time.

Ron was standing in front of his mother's wheelchair. As the wind whipped the candle flames around, making them throw a flickering light, Shayne suddenly felt like he was in a nightmare from which he couldn't awake. Ron's grime-smeared face, the knife clutched tightly in his hand, reflecting the light from its blade . . . It was a tableau from Hell.

Braddock was a few feet away, having drawn back when Ron charged into the room, and now he lunged toward his son. Ron spun, lashing out with the knife, and Braddock cried out, staggering back, holding a wrist that was suddenly dripping blood.

Shayne started forward, but Ron whipped back around, the knife held up and ready, stained with crimson now. Ron said, "Stay back, Shayne! I'll cut you, too!"

"Forget it, Ron," Shayne said bleakly. "Your little game is over. We all know now what you've been up to."

"The three of you know," Ron grinned. All of the fear he had shown earlier seemed to be gone now. He was in the grip of something else. "If you're all gone, then nobody will know, and it'll be like your little mystery never even existed, Shayne."

"You can't get away with killing all three of us," Shayne grated. He was watching for an opening, some chance to jump Ron. He wasn't worried too much about himself, he was sure he could handle Ron, but as long as Braddock and Amelia were there, they were in danger, too.

"I can let the storm kill you," Ron told him. "Or at least it'll look like it. You'll all be blown off the terrace by the winds. I'll say that I came back up here to help you with my mother, but that by the time I got up here, the penthouse was collapsing and I couldn't get to you. The story will hold up. You'll never see for yourself, though. You'll be dead, Shayne."

SHAYNE KNEW HE MIGHT BE RIGHT. The ceiling would go any minute, he knew, from the tremendous weight of the water trapped on top of it. There would be some suspicion cast on Ron if they all died. but with the devastation caused by the storm, it would be next to impossible to prove anything.

Braddock was bleeding pretty badly, Shayne saw. He would need some sort of medical attention soon if he was going to keep from bleeding to death. Shayne's muscles tensed. He was going to have to jump Ron and take his chances. There was nothing left to do, no time left either

Ron jumped backward and grabbed Amelia's wheelchair as she screamed. He whirled it around and gave it a shove to start it rolling, then ran behind it, making it pick up speed as it went. Amelia shrieked in horror as her son propelled her through the living room, toward the broken window and the terrace beyond.

Shayne sprinted after them. Braddock cried out and tried to run after Shayne, but his movements were shambling and slow. He had lost too much blood, was too weak now. Shayne was the only hope Amelia had.

Ron gave the chair a last shove as he sent it flying out onto the terrace in the rain. Then he spun, bringing the knife around and cutting savagely at Shayne. Shayne flung up an arm, felt the blade cut through his clothes and bite deep into his arm. He drove his other elbow out, smashing it into Ron's body and knocking him out of the way. He ignored the pain in his slashed arm as he plunged into the rain after Amelia.

The chair was rolling out of control on the rain-slick tiles of the terrace, and Amelia was too terrified to think about using the controls on the arm. The low railing of the terrace loomed up in front of her. She cried out in pain as the chair smashed into it, pinning her legs and then starting to tip forward from its momentum. She started to pitch out of the chair, her cry lost now in the wind's ululating howl

Shayne plucked her out of the chair, the adrenalin coursing through him making her seem weightless. He tried to stop his head-long plunge, the plunge that had let him catch up to the chair, but his legs caught against the railing. His momentum was too much, just as the chair's had been, and as the chair, empty now, went on over the railing awkwardly and started the long fall to the street below, Shayne felt himself going after it.

One arm was wrapped tightly around Amelia, and the other one was outstretched, the fingers desperately seeking for something to grab. He felt cold metal and clutched at it, skin slipping on the slick

surface and finally finding purchase. He hung on, his grip on the railing about as precarious as it could get. It was all that stood between him and Amelia and the long plunge to death.

Shayne kicked up with one foot, got a leg behind part of the railing. Rain pelted his face, wind tugged at him. Nature wanted to take them and throw them down from this perch, wanted them to go plummeting to the concrete below, and Shayne was damned if he was going to let it do that. He felt jolts of pain from the injuries he had only recently recuperated from, but he thrust the pain out of his head and started the slow, hard process of pulling them back up onto the terrace. Amelia was limp in his arms, and he was thankful she had fainted. Dead weight was easier to handle in some circumstances, and this was one of them. Conscious, she might have struggled and made them both fall.

Shayne looked up, blinking the rain from his eyes, and saw Ron's face looming above them. The knife was coming toward his fingers, the fingers that were holding onto the railing for dear life.

And there wasn't anything Shayne could do about it.

RON LEANED FORWARD SUDDENLY, TERROR SPRINGING UP in his eyes. He wasn't leaning, he was falling. He dropped the knife, scrabbled for a handhold as his weight tipped out over the railing. Braddock was behind him, pushing with a strength he shouldn't have been able to muster, slamming into him and knocking him off balance

Shayne pulled upwards with all the energy he had left, hugging the railing as Ron slipped past them. He felt the man's hands brush against his back, heard the terrible scream coming from his throat. Shayne held on tighter.

Then the clutching hands at his back were gone. There was nothing behind him now but the wind and the rain.

And Braddock was taking hold of him, pulling him up, working with Shayne to lift Amelia over the railing. Shayne went over it himself, slipping down to the terrace and lying there in the water for a long moment, letting the rain pound him.

Then he and Braddock took Amelia to the elevator and lifted her up through the trapdoor.

Shayne was the last one up, and as he pulled himself through the trapdoor, he caught a glimpse through the anteroom of the penthouse roof giving way over the living room, dropping a torrent into the room. It would be coming into the elevator shaft, he knew. He found more strength somewhere inside himself and barked at Braddock, "Drop down! I'll lower her to you!"

Braddock did as Shayne told him. As Shayne crouched at the side of the car and watched the butler let himself to fall to the floor below, he could see spouts of water starting to come into the shaft.

"All right!" Braddock called up to him. "I'm ready!"

Shayne gripped the harness tightly and started letting Amelia down the side of the car. She hung limply, and again her faint was a blessing. Shayne felt the torn sheets go slack and knew that Braddock had her. It was nearly pitch dark inside the shaft now. He swung his legs around and let them dangle beside the car. It took him only a second to drop down to the floor below, but when he landed on the bottom of the private elevator's shaft, it was in several inches of water.

Through the open door on this floor, he could see Braddock waiting for him, Amelia in his arms. She was starting to come around again now, but Shayne knew it would be a little while before she was fully aware of what was going on. He took her from Braddock and said, "Get moving! The stairs could flood, too!"

Braddock nodded and started down the narrow staircase that was next to the regular elevators. Shayne staggered after him, the water escaping from the roof swirling around his ankles.

By the time they reached the next floor, they were ahead of the water. It was still one of the longest journeys Shayne had ever made, bounding down flight after flight of stairs in near-darkness, Amelia in his arms. When they were halfway down the building, Braddock stumbled, his loss of blood and his age finally taking their inexorable toll. He told Shayne to go on.

Shayne held Amelia tighter, slipped his other arm around Braddock, and kept going.

SHAYNE ALMOST DIDN'T BELIEVE IT when they finally emerged into the lobby of the building and found Lois, Janet, and Patten waiting for them, huddled together. For a while, it had seemed as if he would be climbing down those stairs eternally, all the way to hell.

"Are you all right?" Patten asked, raising his voice to be heard over the rumble of water from the flooded street outside. Shayne nodded and jerked a thumb upwards.

"We'd better go back up to the second floor," he said. "There's water coming down from the roof, and more coming from the street. This floor's going to be under before long."

Patten took Amelia from him and started up the stairs. Braddock slumped against the wall, trying to get his breath, as Janet caught at him and cried, "Where's Ron? Ron went back up to help you! Didn't you see him?"

Braddock looked up at her, and he appeared far older now than his years. He was an old, old man as he said, "Ron . . . is dead. He was trying to help with his mother . . . when the roof collapsed. He . . . he was swept off the roof."

Janet and Lois both cried out in horror, and Braddock looked past them at Shayne. Shayne's eyes locked with his for a long moment, and then Shayne said in a hard voice, "Come on, ladies, we've got to get back upstairs."

Braddock hadn't had any say in the way his son lived, Shayne knew. But he could have a say in the way he had died, even if it was a lie.

And that was all right with Shayne.

IT WAS MORNING BEFORE SHAYNE GOT BACK to his apartment. The storm was gone, moved further inland, where it was dumping more rain on the interior. But the sun was starting to peek through the clouds in Miami, and the clean-up would be beginning soon.

The old apartment hotel on Second Avenue looked virtually unscathed. A few windows were broken, Shayne saw, and the Miami River had probably been up over the road, but it was back down now, at least for the moment. It would rise again when the flood water from inland arrived, but the city could cope with that.

Shayne was bone tired as he rode up to the second floor in the elevator. He didn't want to see a staircase again for a while. The cut on his arm had been dressed and stitched up at a Red Cross emergency center. Twenty hours of sleep, followed by a long, stiff drink of cognac would work wonders, he knew. It wouldn't take him long to bounce back.

There was no time for long convalescences in the private detective business.

Lucy Hamilton came into his arms as he opened the door of his apartment, kissing him fiercely, and when he pulled away from her a long moment later, he was grinning.

"Don't you ever make me sit through a hurricane by myself again, Michael Shayne!" she exclaimed. "I was scared out of my wits. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, Angel. How about you?"

"It wasn't too bad here. You were right, this was the best place to go. But what happened to you? I was so worried. I called the police like you told me to, but I don't know if they ever showed up or not."

"It was a pretty hectic night. I'm sure they had better things to do." Shayne kept his arm around her as he walked over to the sofa and

sank gratefully onto it, unmindful of his filthy clothes.

"Was somebody really trying to murder that lady?" Lucy asked. "Did you find out what it was all about?"

"There wasn't any murder," Shayne said. "Kind of unusual for one of my cases. Just a mixed-up family with a lot of problems, and a hurricane on top of them. Maybe it worked out for the best, maybe it didn't. I'll tell you all about it after I've had some sleep."

"All right," Lucy said softly. "You go to sleep, Michael. I'll be here when you wake up."

"I know, Angel," Shayne murmured. He was glad he was home. ●

New AMAZING ADVENTURES
with A THOUSAND NEW AIR-THRILLS!

The gangs take to wings
...to blast the Axis spies
from America's skies!

DEAD END KIDS
and
LITTLE TOUGH GUYS

in
**JUNIOR G-MEN
OF THE AIR**

with
Billy HALOP Gene REYNOLDS
Lionel ATWILL Frank ALBERTSON
Frankie DARRO Richard LANE

12
ALL-NEW
THRILL
CHAPTERS

Original Screen Play: Paul Huston • George H. Plympton • Griffin Jay

Additional Dialogue, Brenda Weisberg

Directed by RAY TAYLOR and LEW COLLINS Associate Producer, HENRY MacRAE

A UNIVERSAL CHAPTER-PLAY

The Amazon was back on the job, investigating the murder of a mermaid with an arrow through her head!

Valentine For A Dead Lady

by MEL D. AMES

SHE LAY FACE DOWN IN THE POOL, her blonde hair splayed out over the water like drifting seaweed. She seemed to dangle there like a puppet, her shoulders floating high in the water as though buoyed by an invisible bubble, her shapely hips and limbs undulating limply below the surface. It was not until she had been taken from the water, and stretched out on her back at pool-side, could it be seen the way she had died. Her once pretty face, now blue-lipped and mottled, had been run through with an arrow. The feathered end of the long shaft still protruded grotesquely from the center of her forehead.

The pool stood back about a hundred and fifty feet from the open end of the U-shaped ranch house, where the owners of Conklin Ranch had resided in comfort and conflict for half a century. A roofed-over patio filled in the U, and a column of lofty trees rose out of the green carpet of the grass to encircle the expansive grounds like silent sentinels.

Beyond the trees, on three sides, the flat lands stretched away into gently rolling hills, their distant crests dotted with grazing cattle. And to the north, a scant five miles from the towering timber gates to the Conklin properties, Metro's concrete jungle sprawled over the unsuspecting horizon like a malignant cancer.

The sun was already high in the heavens as a large, weathered-looking man in western attire stood waiting beside the dead woman, watching the approach across the lawn of two imposing figures.

One, a woman, was a striking six-foot Amazon beauty with hair the color of ripe wheat. She moved with the awesome effortlessness of a jungle cat, and even from a distance, the subtle power and grace of the

body that moved beneath the intended camouflage of the tailored gray suit was clearly manifest.

The other, equally as tall, but a thick-set and obviously well-muscled male, walked in step beside her. He displayed a quiet self assurance that was evident even in the obfuscating shadow of his remarkable companion. As they drew near, Conklin addressed himself to the man.

"Lieutenant Carruthers?"

Detective-Sergeant Mark Swanson smiled indulgently and re-directed the query with a nod of his head to his attractive cohort.

"I'm Lieutenant Carruthers," the blonde beauty responded brightly. "Officially: Detective-Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers — Metro Central, Eleventh Precinct." She flashed her badge, then topped off the official dissertation with a dazzling smile. Mark knew that his senior partner was simply playing games. She no longer took offense at the hesitancy of some to accept her, a woman, in what had traditionally been a male role. He could not remember anyone, however, hesitating for long.

IT HAD BEEN THE BETTER PART OF A YEAR, Mark recalled, since Cathy Carruthers had first invaded Homicide, Metro Central's last bastion of male chauvinism. She had met the challenge of her initiation with the femininity of a fire-breathing dragon, and had emerged miraculously unscathed some weeks later with the respect and reluctant admiration of her burly colleagues. They now called her "The Amazon," with affection, but showed no quarter in their good-natured taunting of Mark Swanson, her self-appointed and trusted side-kick.

"You must be Mr. Conklin," Lieutenant Carruthers said now with practiced charm.

"Yes." Conklin seemed more discomfited by her smile than the revelation of her authority.

"You are the owner and manager of the Conklin properties?"

"That's right."

"Are you acquainted with this unfortunate young lady, Mr. Conklin?"

"Yes, of course. That's Melody — Melody Slade. She's my sister."

"Then, perhaps, you can tell me what happened."

"I don't know what happened, Lieutenant. The pool is visible from my suite in the west wing of the ranch house. There," he pointed a leathery finger, "you can see it from here. I had just got back in from the south range when I noticed her from the window, floating face down in the water."

"When was this?"

Conklin looked at his watch. "About an hour ago. Say, 10:20? I phoned you people as soon as I saw the way she had died. She looked so strange, Lieutenant, lying there like that, her head and limbs dangling under the water. My God, who would want to do this to Melody?"

"Did you see anyone else?"

"Yes, Crampton, the grounds man. He helped me get her out of the pool."

"Where is Crampton now?"

"I sent him after Slade. Stephen Slade, Melody's husband. I figured he'd probably be at the Country Club. That's his usual haunt."

AS THEY TALKED, THE LIEUTENANT'S DISCERNING BLUE EYES had been probing the mirrored surface of the pool. She turned to her colleague. "Mark, there's something floating in the water — there, just below the surface. See if you can fish it out. And there's something else over there, in the corner at the shallow end."

Mark reached for a gaff-pole from a pool-side rack and pulled a deflated rubber air-mattress from the water. Then from the far side of the pool, he retrieved an archer's bow. The Lieutenant inspected the bow first, balancing it with professional familiarity by the taut string on the tip of a finger.

"Mr. Conklin," she said at length, "who at Conklin Ranch is able to manipulate this weapon with any degree of accuracy?"

"Me, for one, Lieutenant. And Melody, there. We are both experienced archers. But we never thought of it as a weapon."

"Anyone else?"

"Not that I am aware of."

"Well, that seems to narrow things down a bit, doesn't it?" She regarded him intently from behind an unruly fall of golden hair.

"Now see here, Lieutenant, if you think I had anything to do with this ghastly business, you're sadly mistaken. Why, in God's name, would I want to kill my own sister?"

Mark was not surprised when the Lieutenant chose to quietly ignore the man's question and to center her attention on the bikini clad figure of the victim. She had been a lovely young woman, in her late twenties perhaps, with a good body that was evenly tanned from long leisure hours under the sun.

"Mr. Conklin," the Lieutenant said idly, "did you get along well with your sister?"

"Yes. She was devoted to me, and I to her."

"Did she also have a financial interest in the Conklin properties?"

"Yes. We are — *were* the only surviving family. We had equal interest in the estate."

"— until now."

"Now, look here, Lieutenant —"

The rancher broke off as Cathy Carruthers suddenly dropped to one knee beside the body. In so doing, she inadvertently flashed a length of silken thigh that required no official dissertation to be recognized or appreciated.

"Look at this, Mark," The Lieutenant had turned the impaled head to one side and drawn a red-tipped finger along a slight abrasion on the side of the neck.

"I'm looking," he muttered, with some ambiguity, but his eyes dutifully followed the path of her fingers as she cleared back some of the blonde hair that had matted behind the skull. The rounded tip of the arrow, now exposed, jutted out a full inch beyond the scalp. He noticed, too, with a slight flip of his stomach, that a certain amount of interior matter had come through with the arrow, although there appeared to have been little or no bleeding.

"It would require a well placed arrow to achieve that kind of penetration, wouldn't you say, Mr. Conklin?"

"Yes," Conklin agreed, "it would."

"And from relatively close range, with this weight of bow. Say — fifty feet. Seventy-five, maybe — at the outside."

"I'd say that."

"That distance would have put the bowman (or bowperson) well out in the open, away from the cover of the house. Not the ideal site from which to launch an arrow with any semblance of stealth. The entire area between the pool and the patio is clearly visible from both wings of the ranch house. A rare and puzzling speculation, I must say." Mark looked on with interest as the Lieutenant thrust out one supple hip and assumed an archer's pose before the rancher; one arm extended, the other drawn back as she sighted down an imaginary arrow. "It would almost suggest that Melody Slade had stood willingly beside the pool, face to face with her murderer, the very fiend who unleashed that deadly arrow."

She let the arrow fly. "Züüp!"

"Uh — yeah." Conklin had flinched at the release of the invisible arrow and tried now to cover his embarrassment. "I see what you mean."

"But still, if it was someone she knew, and trusted —"

The Lieutenant's words drew some color to Conklin's weathered

cheeks, but the man did not respond.

"Have you ever hunted with a bow and arrow, Mr. Conklin?"

"No, I damn well haven't."

"Well, I have, sir. I have no hesitancy in stating that I am an accomplished toxophilite of no mean ability. And you can take my word for this: the skull is an extremely resilient part of the human anatomy, especially at the point where this particular arrow made entry. The trajectory of the arrow in flight would have to be shallow indeed, in order to strike the surface of the skull at precisely the right angle. And I do mean *right* angle. Otherwise it would tend to deflect, to ricochet off the malleable bone structure and, at best, to achieve a minimal, angular penetration. As an experienced archer, Mr. Conklin, would you agree with those observations?"

"With all due respect, Lieutenant, you're speculating in an area of which I know little or nothing. I —"

Mark Swanson looked on with some amusement as the Amazon again ignored the rancher in mid-sentence. It was a deliberate ploy, of course, to throw the man off balance, to get him to reveal something in anger that he would ordinarily have sufficient composure to withhold from her. But Conklin, though clearly annoyed, remained silent.

THE LIEUTENANT, ENGROSSED NOW IN AN INCH-BY-INCH search through the folds of the deflated air mattress, absently fingered a screw valve that appeared to have loosened, then suddenly straightened with an I-thought-so smile as she poked an immaculately-lacquered finger through a small hole in the pillow end of the mattress. Her finger probed the hole, then emerged through the material on the other side.

"In one side and out the other," she said matter-of-factly, "just like the hole in the head of our unhappy sunbather. By the way, Mark, do you know what day this is?"

"Yeah, Saturday. February 14th."

"That's a man for you." She curled a crimson lip and arched the eyebrow nearest to him. "It's also St. Valentine's day. A little ironic, don't you think?"

"I forgot to send you a Valentine?"

The Amazon smiled patiently. "Don't you find it something of an irony that Melody Slade should receive *the* original Valentine — imagine, an *arrow* — delivered by Cupid, himself, and right on St. Valentine's day?"

"Yeah, some Cupid — and *some* Valentine." Mark made an

appropriate grimace. "But I guess it is kind of ironic, when you put it like that."

"Especially," the Amazon parleyed, delivering her *coupe de grace* with a bedeviling smile, "when you consider that the lady was dead when she received it."

"Huh?"

The two men gaped at her, then at each other. But before they could speak, she had given Mark an esoteric wink and was moving off across the lawn toward the ranch house, where a number of police vehicles had drawn up with lights flashing. Mark regarded the familiar contours of her receding silhouette with a blend of affection and chagrin. He wondered if he would ever become accustomed to these oracular broadsides — so casually expounded. And he knew from his relatively brief experience with this astonishing woman, that her startling comment would be anything but idle speculation.

MARK WATCHED CONKLIN TAKE OFF after the Lieutenant as the various police teams began to converge on the pool area to perform their specialized functions. The Medical Examiner was the last to arrive.

"What've we got this time, Mark?"

"You're looking at it, Sam."

"*Sonofagun*." It took something bizarre to get a reaction out of Sam Morton.

"The Lieutenant figures she was dead before Cupid delivered the arrow," Mark proffered.

"That so?" The M.E. emitted a disparaging grunt as he bent over the body. "You still teamed up with the Amazon?"

"Yeah."

"Might have known. That lady's sure got an uncanny eye for detail. Anything else?"

"You tell us." Mark had turned and was heading for the ranch house. "And before you move her out," he called back over his shoulder, "you better have the Lab dust that arrow."

"Gotcha."

THE LIEUTENANT WAS IN THE MAIN CENTRAL ROOM of the ranch house when Mark caught up with her. Here, the Conklin money was clearly visible. The room was immense. From the high, vaulted, heavily-beamed ceiling to the mammoth fieldstone fireplace that claimed the entire north wall, it was the epitome of rustic luxury. The furnishings, like the room, were large and sumptuous, a pastoral

fantasy of swirling wood grains and soft, richly-scented leathers. Mark moved gingerly over the deep, sculptured carpet to where the Lieutenant stood with Conklin, talking to a somewhat pallid, dapper-looking man with sleek black hair and a thin mustache.

"Mr. Slade," the Lieutenant was saying, "do you think you can recall the precise time you left the ranch house this morning?"

"Around nine, I'd say." There was a thin thread of antagonism in the man's voice. "Melody was still in the pool. We left together Conklin and I."

"Well, not quite together," Conklin put in quickly. "We left the patio at the same time, but your car was still in the driveway when I drove out."

Slade shrugged his thin shoulders.

"Then you *were* the last to leave, Mr. Slade, except, of course, for your wife."

"Looks that way."

"Were there no servants in the house?"

"No," Conklin volunteered. "Mrs. McInnes had set up a buffet breakfast on the patio, then left for the local Farmers' Market. I don't believe she has returned even yet." He lifted his eyes in a gesture of pained forbearance. "Her penchant for thrift is something we endure, rather than encourage."

"I take it that Mrs. McInnes is the housekeeper."

"Yes."

"Which means then, there were only three of you for breakfast. You two, and Melody."

"And Helen," said Slade.

"Helen?"

"Helen Mundy." Slade stroked his pencil-line mustache. "She's my wife's physiotherapist. Melody was a health freak, Lieutenant — you know, organic foods, yoga, massage, and now (believe it or not) pool therapy."

"I see. And when did Miss Mundy arrive?"

"She lives in. She has her own rooms in the east wing — just down the hall from ours."

"Yeah," said Conklin with a derisive curl of his lip, "real cozy like."

Slade's reaction was instantaneous. "Why don't you go milk a cow, or something?" he spat out.

Conklin ignored the sudden hostility. "Helen and Melody were the first ones down," he said to the Lieutenant. "They were in the middle of some kind of therapy session, splashing about in the pool, while

Slade and I were having breakfast. Helen was also the first one to leave. Melody was on the air mattress in the pool, sunning herself, and we were still swilling coffee on the patio when she pulled out of the driveway."

"And where was Crampton during this time?"

"I sent him on an errand," Slade mumbled. He seemed to be in something of a sulk. "I didn't see him again until he came looking for me, after Melody was — killed."

"Was that before, or after breakfast?"

"Lieutenant?"

"The errand. When did Crampton leave on the errand?"

"Oh — just before breakfast, before I came out on the patio."

"Stephen!"

AN ATTRACTIVE YOUNG WOMAN HAD SUDDENLY APPEARED in the doorway. She wore a chalk-white tennis costume that set off her trim figure with stunning effect and gave sharp contrast to a head of beautiful black hair that tumbled loosely about her shoulders. Her voice was on the quiet side of panic. "What happened? Why are the police —?"

Slade went to her quickly and took her hands in his own. "It's Melody, Helen. There's been an — an accident."

"Accident?"

"Melody's been shot. She's — dead."

"Oh dear God." Helen Mundy sank weakly into one of the huge leather chairs. Her face had paled under a look of utter bewilderment. "Sh — shot?"

"With an arrow," Conklin added. "She must have died instantly."

Slade jerked his head up to stare open-mouthed at Conklin. Then at Lieutenant Carruthers. His face was a veritable question mark. "Have they taken her away yet, Lieutenant?"

The Lieutenant glanced at Mark.

"Not yet," Mark said.

Slade headed for the door. "I've got to see her," he muttered, as though suddenly, inexplicably shaken by the full realization of her death. "I — I've got to see her." As he swept out of the room, Mark made a move to follow, but in response to an almost imperceptible tilt of the Lieutenant's golden head, he held his ground.

"Mr. Conklin." Cathy Carruthers turned to the rancher with a condolent smile. "Miss Mundy appears to be somewhat shaken at the moment. Perhaps, while she pulls herself together, you wouldn't mind showing the Sergeant and me over the rest of the house. I'd like

to start with the Slade's east wing suite, then Miss Mundy's rooms."

"If you insist," the rancher grunted. Courtesy was apparently not a priority item on Conklin's list of things-to-do-today.

"And Mark." The Lieutenant drew her colleague toward the door that opened out on the patio. "Have a policewoman see to Miss Mundy here, then assign an officer to go after Slade. I want him back here when we return. And, yes, we'd better have a team to give us a hand on our tour of inspection."

"Right, Lieutenant."

As Mark left the room, the Lieutenant motioned Conklin to one side, out of hearing. "You made an inference a while back, Mr. Conklin, about Mr. Slade and Miss Mundy. Would you kindly elaborate now, for my benefit?"

"Well," the rancher glanced uncertainly toward the girl, "it's no secret, damn it. Not anymore. Even Melody knew what was going on."

"And she still kept the girl in her employ?"

"Why not? If it wasn't Helen, it would be someone else. This way, Melody probably felt she could keep an eye on them."

"There was no bad feeling between them?"

"I didn't say that. Melody just seemed to keep things under control. In fact, they were quietly going at it this morning, when I came down to breakfast. Melody was threatening to tell Slade something she had found out about her — something from Helen's past."

"Did she?"

"No. The little creep wasn't down yet, and they had already left for the pool when he finally did show."

"What was it that Melody had on Miss Mundy?"

"I have no idea."

"Do you think their affair had any substance, Mr. Conklin?"

"Substance?"

"Were they genuinely in love with each other?"

"On Helen's side, possibly — but Stephen Slade has no more fidelity in his pagan soul than a range bull in a herd of heifers."

THE ROOMS IN THE EAST WING WERE MICROCOSMS of the main central lounge. But for the frilled canopy over the king-sized bed, and the flowered pattern in the drapes that hung at the floor-to-ceiling windows on the south wall, there was no feminine influence in evidence anywhere. Lieutenant Carruthers drew Conklin's attention to the obvious omission.

"My father," the rancher said in explanation, "has been dead now

about two years. The ranch house is a kind of monument to his memory. Melody and I agreed, soon after his death, to respect his wishes and maintain the house the way he originally designed it. The west wing, my side of the house, is virtually no different from this — except for a welcome lack of flowers and frills —”

At the window, Mark listened absently to Conklin history while looking out across the lawn toward the pool. He could see Melody Slade being borne away under a white sheet, the shaft of the arrow making a small tent at one end of the stretcher. And Slade, in the company of a uniformed policeman, was walking slowly, head bent, back toward the house. Here and there, an officer poked about in the flower beds, or probed the loose soil at the base of the encircling trees. The entire grounds were under search for some small clue to the identity of the deadly bowman.

The inspection of Slade's suite of rooms had turned up nothing of interest to the Lieutenant, and so the entourage had moved in a body down an inside hall to Helen Mundy's quarters. Again, there was nothing feminine in the decor, but here there could be little doubt as to the identity of the attractive occupant. The odd piece of therapeutic equipment had been left haphazardly about on the floor, or stuffed carelessly into a closet, and tell-tale wisps of feminine attire created a kind of nylon jungle in the bathroom. And in the bedroom, a fashionable “cubic-foot” tote bag, made of clear polyethylene with a leather draw-string opening, had been tossed carelessly onto the counterpane. An assortment of massage oils, creams and emulsions lay strewn, half in and half out of the bag. The Lieutenant ran her finger lightly along the leather thong.

“It's wet,” she said. “Did she have this bag with her this morning?”

“Sure thing — it's part of her stock in trade,” Conklin attested. “She's seldom without it.”

IN THE WEST WING, CONKLIN'S SIDE OF THE HOUSE, they discovered a rifle, a 30.30 lever-action Savage. One of the officers held it out, cradled in a handkerchief, to the Lieutenant. She was standing in front of the window, looking thoughtfully out toward the pool. It was the same view that Mark had had from the east wing only minutes before, but from a slightly different angle. *It would make an unbelievably easy target, she mused, an unsuspecting sunbather, framed by the pool —*

“Lieutenant?”

“Huh —?” Taken unaware, Mark noticed her face could be as soft and ingenuous as that of a schoolgirl.

"It was in a gun case," the officer was saying, "closed, but not locked. It's been fired."

The Lieutenant took the rifle with an impatient toss of her blonde head. She eased the lever half way, sniffed. The empty cartridge, she saw, was still in the breach. "What can you tell me about this, Mr. Conklin?"

"I haven't used that gun in months." A flush of color had risen to Conklin's leathery cheeks.

"It's been recently fired."

"Not by me, damn it."

She handed the rifle back to the officer. "Have the Lab dust the entire case, as well as the gun. You'd better hurry before they leave. And officer, have that swimming pool drained immediately, and the entire pool area searched. We are now looking for an expended piece of lead."

"Yes, sir — uh, Mam."

The Lieutenant smoothed over the officer's confusion with an understanding smile before addressing the rancher. "Mr. Conklin, I'm afraid you'll have to come downtown with us. I'm sorry to inconvenience you this way, but we'll need a statement, you understand, as well as a paraffin test."

"Where? And a what?" Conklin's tone reflected his mounting irritation.

"Headquarters," the Lieutenant replied patiently, "and a simple procedure to determine whether you have recently fired a gun."

"Save your candle wax for the power shortage, Lieutenant." The big man was becoming increasingly more irate. "I shot a coyote this morning, no more than an hour'n'half ago, out on the south range. At least I shot at it."

"And the gun?"

"A Remington 30.06. It's in my pick-up. I never go out there without it."

Mark nodded to the second officer who immediately left to retrieve the Remington from the truck. Seeing the officer go seemed to trigger Conklin. He suddenly exploded.

"Listen, lady." He stood squarely in the center of the room, his hands on his hips and a look of ugly frustration on his face. He was plainly used to running his own show — *giving* orders, not taking them. "I've had just about all of this I can handle," he seethed. "Are you sure you know what the hell you're doing? I thought lady cops were supposed to be out checking parking meters. So what're you doing here anyway? All this crap about guns, and paraffin, and

draining swimming pools — It's obvious to anyone with half an eye that Melody died from an arrow through her brain, and I don't intend to stand around here while you mark time in a pair of men's shoes that are clearly three sizes too big for you." He spun to face Mark with the anger still boiling within him. "Now get this dumb broad outta here before I really lose my temper."

The Lieutenant spoke softly to Mark. "Take him in," she said simply.

"Lady," Conklin fumed, "you're not taking *me* anywhere." The enraged rancher turned suddenly and headed for the open door. In two fluid strides the Amazon had moved up beside him. One flawlessly manicured hand grabbed the back of his collar, while the other fastened itself to the belt at his waist, and in one herculean swing, she had lifted the big man clean off his feet and slammed him face first into the panelled wall. With her superb body coiled like a steel spring, she held him there, three feet off the floor, while her wide-eyed two i.c. obligingly snapped on the cuffs.

"Male chauvinism is one thing," she said with an embarrassed little grin, "but, dumb broad —?" When she let the man go, he dropped like a worn-out winter benny that had missed a coat hook.

Mark picked up the dazed rancher and steered him through the door. He stopped on the threshold and turned to look back at his senior partner. Mark had seen the Amazon in action before, but each new manifestation of the awesome strength and agility of this astounding woman never failed to shake him. She returned his haunted gaze with a look of sublime innocence and a dimpled smile that would have melted the heart of a hangman.

STEPHEN SLADE AND HELEN MUNDY WERE SHARING an overstuffed leather couch in the main central lounge when Mark Swanson and Lieutenant Carruthers returned to the capacious room. A uniformed police officer was standing just inside the door.

"Mr. Slade," the Lieutenant said affably, "I regret that I must ask you to accompany us to Headquarters. We'll need you, too, Miss Mundy."

If the alleged lovers were upset with the Lieutenant's request, it did not show. They both looked more confused and frightened than annoyed.

"Miss Mundy." The Lieutenant seemed to tower above them like the jolly gray giant. "Where was Mr. Conklin and Stephen Slade when you left the ranch this morning?"

"They were on the patio, Lieutenant."

"Did you see anyone else?"

"No, I don't think so — except Crampton."

"Crampton?"

"Yes, I passed him on the road. He was heading back toward the ranch."

"Lieutenant." Slade was having an impatient chew at his lower lip. "Is this going to take very long?"

"No, Mr. Slade. When you're all through downtown, you'll be driven back here. And I must ask you then, to remain within the residence. There will be guards posted."

"Guards?"

"Just routine procedure, Mr. Slade."

"How long is this going to go on?"

"We'll need you at H.Q. again, probably sometime tomorrow afternoon. The department will send a car for you."

"And then?"

"That should wrap it up."

"But —" Slade seemed to be searching for the right words. "What about Melody — the way she died?"

"Mr. Slade," the Lieutenant said patiently, "I already know the way she died."

"Yes, of course. But —"

"But who killed her?" The Lieutenant's piercing gaze drifted slowly from one upturned face to the other before she answered her own question. "Let's just say that it wasn't Cupid."

IT WAS A TYPICAL LATE SUNDAY MORNING at the Eleventh Precinct. The hectic weeklong hustle had slowed to a crawl, and a skeleton staff moved leisurely from one department to another, enjoying a welcome respite.

Lieutenant Cathy Carruthers sat with her back to her desk, a pair of tweezers in one hand, a mirror in the other, and a seeming disinterest in anything beyond maintaining an element of discipline in the eyebrow department. But reflected in the mirror, beyond the foreground image of one beautiful blue eye, she noticed Mark Swanson as he entered the main office. She watched him wave "Hi" at the duty sergeant, pick up the mail and a few call slips from the switchboard operator, then stroll nonchalantly toward her glass-partitioned office. The slight, involuntary brightening of that one blue eye betrayed the unspoken warmth of affection and the high esteem in which she held her chosen partner. She turned to face him as he entered.

"Anything interesting?"

Mark tossed a half dozen letters onto her desk. "I'll get the calls," he said with uncustomary curtness, "while you're checking out the mail." Then, to his partner's mild surprise, he turned on his heel and walked out to one of the empty desks in front of the office. Mark was on this third call when the Lieutenant finally got to the letter on the bottom. He watched slyly as she opened it and drew out a heart-shaped card. The sudden smile she projected at him through the glass partition made the whole gag worthwhile. The card, with his own scribbled verse, read:

Valentines are
Decidedly *dumb*,
But (*broadly* speaking)
You're sure a Hon.

The Lieutenant made a gun out of her fingers, pointed it at Mark, and pulled the trigger. He was still savoring her wide happy grin, watching her slip the card into an inside pocket, when something in his peripheral vision made him look around. A little man, standing eye-to-eye with him, had stopped beside his desk.

Garfield Leprohn (the *Leprechaun*, as he was called by all and sundry) was Metro Central's shortest police officer. He was also head of the Records Department. His status on the force was commensurate with his ability, not his size, which was a happy circumstance for the Leprechaun; but he could never seem to escape the good-natured bantering of his life-size colleagues. Mark took a certain perverse pride in being one of his prime irritants.

"Well, Godzilla, what do *you* want?"

"It is not a question of what *I* want," the Leprechaun said, with all the dignity he could cram into his abbreviated stature. "I have the file on the Slade case, and I would like to discuss it with someone intelligent."

"Sure thing," said Mark, "it should be a welcome change from talking to yourself." He got to his feet and ushered the little man into Lieutenant Carruthers office.

"Garfield." The Lieutenant's use of his given name was a courtesy the Leprechaun cherished. "I've been expecting you. Is that the Slade file?"

"Complete," he beamed. "I'd like to go over it with you."

"Please do."

"Very well then." Mark watched Garfield Leprohn make an irritating ceremony of selecting a chair, before he finally settled back with

an open file and a closed mind. The Leprechaun was in his own narrow little data-gathering heaven, and he intended to make the most of it.

"Both Conklin and the dead woman," he began, "are (*were*, in the case of the victim) veritable pillars of society. There's not a blemish on either one of them, that is, if you can overlook Melody's recent, rather impetuous marriage. Slade, on the other hand, is a good-time-Charlie from way back. He was implicated — but never charged — in a couple of bunko beefs in Seattle, about ten years ago. And that pretty well sets the stage for his whole penny-ante career. Always involved, but never convicted. His marriage to Melody was his third. One previous marriage ended in divorce (the first one) and the other in the wife's death. That was a drowning, where (once again) foul play was suspected, but never proven. Stephen Slade, Lieutenant, is unquestionably one slippery customer."

THE LEPRECHAUN CAME UP FOR AIR, and an encouraging smile from the Amazon. "Now we get to the good part," he said almost gleefully, "Helen Mundy." He treated them both to a sly, off-the-record leer. "She is not, as she claims, a bona fide physiotherapist. She is, however, a masseuse — of a kind. She learned her trade well in a massage parlor on the seamy side of San Diego, where she was picked up for soliciting on three separate occasions. She was sprung each time by the same four-bit lawyer who was known to be on the payroll of a local pimp. That was more than two years ago. She seems to have made a valid effort, though, to play it straight ever since her last bust."

"That must have been what Melody had threatened to tell Slade," the Lieutenant speculated.

"I didn't know anything about that," the Leprechaun added, "but I do know that Melody had a shamus on the payroll. That fit in?"

"It does indeed. That was how she knew about Helen Mundy's lurid past."

The Leprechaun was delighted with the response he was getting. "Well then. Now for Crampton. Elias J. Crampton, to be precise. He started working for the Conklins when he was twenty years old. He hired on when he first arrived in the Metro area, nineteen years ago, with nothing but torn underwear and broken finger nails." He snuck a quick peek to appraise the effect of his colorful prose. "He's had a few run-ins with the law over the years, but nothing serious. He's a lush. And, for what it's worth, Conklin senior was apparently devoted to him."

"Hmm. By the way, Mark." The Lieutenant jotted something on a

note pad. "Have we been able to locate that particular gentleman yet?"

"Yeah. Picked him up early this morning. He was holed up in a sleazy hotel on Slater Street, drunk as a skunk. They've been trying to sober him up ever since."

"Good." She turned her attention back to the Leprechaun. "Did you get anything on the disposition of the estate?"

"Sure did, Lieutenant." The Leprechaun looked like a toy poodle that had just earned a pat on the head. Mark was almost tempted to look down to see if his tail was wagging. "There was a will, of course, left by the senior Conklin. His wife pre-deceased him, and he died himself approximately two years ago. The beneficiaries (Mervin and Melody) were given equal shares of the estate. Melody also had a will, in which she left her entire share of the property to her new husband, Stephen Slade. The Conklin lawyers intimated that Melody fully intended to change her bequest, which was made in *temerarieta* (while under delusion) immediately after her marriage. She just hadn't got around to it."

"Interesting," mused the Lieutenant.

"Ellias J. Crampton was also included in the old man's will," the Leprechaun rambled on. "He was given a life-time annuity, calculated each year-end at one percent of the current book value of the estate (which, you understand, is much less than the market value) with a proviso entitling him to commute the annuity (to age seventy-five) should both the principal beneficiaries pre-decease him. Stephen Slade, by the way, would not be considered a principal beneficiary."

"And the book value of the estate?"

The Leprechaun consulted his file. "In the neighborhood of eight-hundred thousand dollars."

"Some neighborhood," Mark muttered.

"Not," the Leprechaun pointed out, "when you consider that the market value would probably be over two million."

Mark emitted a low whistle and the Lieutenant did a quick calculation on the note pad. "So, to sum it up," she said thoughtfully, "Melody's murder leaves Crampton with his eight-thousand dollar annual stipend (which he had anyway), while Slade and Conklin (assuming that Conklin did not know of Melody's impetuous bequest to Slade) stood to gain roughly a million dollars each."

"That's about it." The Leprechaun handed the file to the Lieutenant with a look of smug satisfaction.

"And, of course, there's Helen Mundy." The Lieutenant steepled her fingers against her lips and tilted her beautiful head. "With

Slade free to remarry, she stood to acquire (as his spouse) a fifty-percent share of a two million dollar property. It looks like motives and suspects are a dime a dozen this morning."

"Four suspects, maybe," said the Leprechaun sagely, thinking he was stating the obvious, "but only one of them is guilty."

"Quite the contrary," the Amazon added quietly, "The way I see it, only one of them is innocent."

THE SQUAD ROOM WAS CUSTOMARILY A QUIET PLACE in the early hours of the afternoon. Sunday, February 15th, was no exception. It was this that had prompted Lieutenant Carruthers to commandeer the room, her own office being too small to accommodate the four principal suspects in the still unresolved St. Valentine's day murder.

There was an anticipatory hush in the room. A policewoman and a male uniformed officer stood just inside the double doors. The Lieutenant, at a desk on the narrow, room-wide podium, appeared to be totally engrossed in the files and reports that were spread before her. Sitting off to one side, Mark was thoughtfully searching the faces of their four unwilling guests. Just why, he was wondering, and by whose hand, had Melody Slade come to her grotesque and untimely end?

Sitting nearest to him, an unkempt and somewhat subdued Mervin Conklin showed the strain of spending a night as a guest of the city. He sat scowling at everything and nothing, tugging irritably at the tangles in his sun-bleached hair with thick stubby fingers.

Slade, though natty as ever, was cadaverously pale. His broody little eyes looked like two lived-in maggot holes in a lump of gorgonzola, as they darted nervously about the room. If you could rely on appearance alone to establish guilt, Mark thought, Slade would head the list.

Between the two men, Helen Mundy sat stiffly on the edge of her chair, assiduously pressing out the wrinkles in a square of rumpled facial tissue. She seemed to have withdrawn into some dark inner refuge, her downcast eyes riveted on the aimless activity in her lap.

The fourth guest, the elusive Elias J. Crampton, had chosen a chair behind the other three. He was a gaunt and angular man, still in his work clothes, and bristling a two-day growth of beard on his thin square jaw. He appeared to be dozing, his skinny frame swaying mindlessly on its wooden perch, like a dried weed in a wind. And he looked to be more troubled by his unwilling withdrawal from the foggy world of the inebriate, than what was about to happen in the squad room.

"Lieutenant." It was Conklin who spoke. "I don't mean any disrespect," he said cautiously, "but I'd like to know just why I've been herded in here like a dogie at roundup. And why, may I ask, was I forced to spend last night in that crummy cell?"

Cathy Carruthers lifted her blonde head as the rancher spoke, her beautiful features inscrutably void of all expression. "Your brief detention, Mr. Conklin, was obviously self induced. Your impetuous behavior yesterday left us little choice. But I do otherwise agree with you. You have not been charged, and we no longer have any reason to detain you."

The Lieutenant rose to her feet and picked up one of the files from the top of her desk. "You may go now, if you wish, Mr. Conklin. I had you brought here this afternoon only because I thought you would be interested to know the final outcome of our investigation."

"You know who killed Melody?"

"Yes."

"Then why not just come out and say it? Why all the dramatics? Damn it, Lieutenant, let the innocent people go."

The Lieutenant gave him a condescending smile. "I have just done that, Mr. Conklin. The only innocent person in this room, is you."

"What the hell're you saying?" Crampton's bleary eyes jerked open. His head wobbled unsteadily atop a turkey-like neck. "I didn't kill nobody."

"No, Mr. Crampton, you did not. But you did attempt to divert the course of justice. And, strange as it may seem, even though all three of you are seriously implicated, there's not one of you who is totally aware of what happened."

"What's to be aware of?" Slade was visibly a frightened man. "Melody was killed by an arrow, and the only people who had access to the archery equipment was Melody herself, and Conklin."

"And Crampton," the rancher added.

Crampton's stomach took that moment to gurgle. He shrank back into his chair, grinning sheepishly out from under his bushy brows. Mark could not restrain a smile.

THE LIEUTENANT RAISED HER HAND FOR ATTENTION and got it. To Mark, watching from the sidelines, it was an electrifying moment. She could be authoritative and so incredibly beautiful at the same time, without depleting one from the other. He saw her straighten to her full stature, and sensed a subtle change in her mood. It was as though she had elected, then, to terminate the myth, and to put living flesh and blood to Homicide's most controversial legend.

And in that instant, it seemed to Mark, she *was* the Amazon, myth and maiden alike.

"I think we had better begin," she said in a low decisive voice, "by dispelling any notion that Melody Slade was killed by a bow and arrow. She was not." She opened the file she held in her hand. "The report I have here, is from Ballistics. It confirms, by an indisputable match-up, that an expended round we picked up yesterday afternoon in the bottom of the drained pool, came from the 30.30 Savage we found in Mr. Conklin's west wing suite."

Slade stirred uncomfortably in his chair. "Then how come Conklin's off the hook? It was his gun."

"Yes, and on top of that, his paraffin test was positive (as was yours). Nevertheless, he did not fire that rifle."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Well, for one thing, Mr. Slade, I find it difficult to accept that any man would be so transparently stupid as to commit a murder with his own gun, in his own room, and then leave the murder weapon in full view where it was certain to be found later by the police. On such a premise, we could almost logically expect to find his fingerprints conveniently left on the rifle. We did not."

"So what does that prove?" Slade pressed his point in desperation. "He probably wiped them off."

"Now why would he do that? His fingerprints were *supposed* to be there — it was *his* gun. No, Mr. Slade, it was not Mr. Conklin who wiped off that rifle. It was you. And even though you were otherwise very thorough, you'll be distressed to learn, I'm sure, that you overlooked one small tell-tale surface."

"Will I, now?" Slade's attempt at bravado was not convincing.

"I'm referring to the cartridge case, Mr. Slade, that you inserted into the breach with thumb and forefinger, and subsequently forgot to remove."

A light seemed to flick on in Slade's head, to flare briefly in the hollow eye sockets, then slowly dim. "Damn," he said.

"Then it *was* Slade." Conklin almost tipped his chair over in his excitement. "Of course — it *had* to be him. He was the last one to see Melody alive." He swung to face his brother-in-law. "You murdering louse —"

"Mr. Conklin," the Amazon cut in sharply. "I will caution you only once to keep yourself under restraint." Mark had tensed instinctively, only to relax a moment later as the big rancher reluctantly settled back in his chair. "It has been relatively obvious from the beginning, Mr. Conklin, even without the paraffin test and fingerprints, that Slade was

the one who shot Melody. But, even so, he is not your sister's murderer."

Conklin squirmed. "You mean he missed?"

"No. The bullet hit her all right. It passed through her head on a path identical to that of the arrow. The only reason he did not kill her, was because Melody was already dead."

"Lieutenant." Some of yesterday's belligerence was beginning to threaten the rancher's Sunday behavior. "I chose to remain here to get some answers, not more riddles. If Slade didn't kill her, who the hell did?"

"Think, Mr. Conklin, to when we first viewed your sister's body." She spoke quietly, as though she were mentally re-living the moment. "The clues to this whole charade were there then. They had only to be interpreted. And frankly, I found the supposition that Melody had actually been impaled by an arrow (and — tch! tch! — through the skull) extremely hard to accept. Not an impossible feat, mind you, just difficult, and highly improbable."

"Then how —?"

"You may recall, Mr. Conklin, that the pillow end of the mattress had two holes in it. One, where your sister's head might well have rested, and the other in the material on the underside of the mattress. If the mattress was inflated at the time (and it must have been, to support the weight of our unhappy victim) then those two rupture points would have been several inches apart. When you weigh this observation against that of the arrow having projected a meager inch beyond the back of the skull, the discrepancy becomes untenable. A bullet, I was quick to assume, would more logically have made those holes."

"But the arrow was *there*," Conklin insisted.

"Yes, it was. But I would think it more likely that the arrow had been inserted into a hole that had first been reamed through by a bullet. And to support this premise, there was the interior matter that appeared to have been *pushed out* ahead of the arrow. Had the arrow gone through the skull with the speed and force necessary for that kind of penetration, it would have done so (in my opinion) cleanly. It would have tended to sear and cauterize the wound and, ultimately, to prevent such leakage by its very presence."

Conklin raised his eyes to the ceiling in a gesture of utter frustration. "What you're saying now, Lieutenant, is that Melody was *not* killed by the arrow, that she *was* shot by Slade, but that he *did not* kill her, and that she was *already dead* before he did it. Will you kindly get to the mother-lovin' point?"

"The point is, Mr. Conklin, that Melody was not killed by an arrow or a bullet. She was asphyxiated. The blue, mottled appearance of her face was the first attestation of that. And, I might add, the unusual absence of any meaningful bleeding would further suggest that her heart had stopped pumping, well before her skull had been punctured, by whatever means."

Conklin straightened excitedly. "But — but, Lieutenant. If what you say is true: that Slade didn't kill her, and Crampton only 'diverted the course of justice' (as you so aptly put it), and that I am the only innocent one here, then that just leaves —"

"Yes, Mr. Conklin. That leaves — Helen Mundy."

THE TROUBLED EYES OF HELEN MUNDY met those of the Amazon for the first time since she had entered the squad room. The paralyzing fear that had gripped her appeared now to have abated, and it seemed almost with a measure of relief that she now faced her accuser. Her voice, when she spoke, was a fragile whisper.

"You've known all along, haven't you?"

"Just about."

"And all along, I've known that you knew. I could sense it. I'm glad now that it's over." Her eyes blinked at the gathering moisture. "But how could you be so certain, Lieutenant, just from the way she looked, the blotches . . . ?"

"There was also an unexplained abrasion on the side of her neck," the Amazon put in quietly.

"Yes, but that could so easily have been self-inflicted — in so many ways. Surely, you had more to go on than that."

"In the main lounge," the Amazon recalled, "you were eminently more startled by the fact that Melody had been shot, than you were from the news of her death (as was Slade, when he first heard about the arrow). You had left her, dead, from asphyxiation; Slade had left her, dead (or so he supposed), from a gun shot wound. It must have been a disconcerting moment for both of you."

Miss Mundy breathed a low reflective sigh and looked over at Slade. His pasty face was expressionless, his eyes were empty hollows. The maggots seemed to have drawn quietly back out of sight.

"It was not until we searched your rooms, Miss Mundy, and I saw the polyethylene tote bag, that I realized how you had managed it. Until then, drowning had seemed to be the only means at your disposal, but that didn't coincide with the way the body had floated so high in the water, with the air so obviously still trapped in the lungs. The M.E.'s report, by the way, has since confirmed asphyxiation as the

mode of death and, conversely, ruled out drowning. But it was the wet leather drawstring that put the clincher on it."

"It was her own damn fault," Helen Mundy sobbed into the crumpled tissue. "She just wouldn't keep her mouth shut."

"It was then, of course, when she threatened to expose you, that you decided to silence her, once and for good. How long could it have taken to empty the tote bag of its contents — one, two seconds — and then to slip it over Melody's unsuspecting head?" The girl's dark hair covered her face and hands as she wept uncontrollably. "Then by quickly expelling the excess air with the flat of your hands, and tightening the leather thong —"

"Oh God." Conklin had cradled his cheeks in his heavy hands. "And we were right there, watching it happen."

"The clear plastic of the bag could hardly be noticed from that distance," the Amazon pointed out, "even had you been looking for it. The drawstring, of course, is what caused the abrasion on her neck, and the inevitable struggle that ensued was the 'splashing about' that you had attributed to the pool therapy."

"But how could she have gotten Melody onto that mattress without our seeing?"

The Lieutenant directed the query to the distraught woman. "Miss Mundy?"

"I — I didn't," she replied after a tortured pause. Her hysteria had lapsed into a series of jerking sobs. "I — I slid the mattress under her, using the side of the pool as a kind of — of third hand. It's a maneuver I learned in a life-saving class when I — I was still in my teens."

"And then (correct me if I'm wrong), you loosened the air valve in the mattress so that it would deflate slowly, giving you time to leave and to establish an alibi. Then, when everyone had left the scene, the weight of your victim (who appeared to those on the patio, to be happily sunbathing) would eventually sink into the pool along with the deflated air mattress. You had set the stage, Miss Mundy, for what you hoped would seem to be an accidental drowning. Unfortunately, as in most unpremeditated crimes, you overlooked so many things."

HELEN MUNDY'S PRETTY FACE WAS TWISTED IN ANGUISH and the eyes she lifted to the podium were red-rimmed and glazed with fear.

"Are you prepared now to make a statement, Miss Mundy?"

The girl nodded dispiritedly, and the policewoman, on some obscure signal, moved in quickly. Helen Mundy accepted her escort's hand on her arm without protest until they had reached the door to the hall.

Here, she stopped abruptly, and turned.

"The arrow." Her voice was a thin, bewildered plea. "How could the arrow —?"

The Lieutenant condoned the delay with a slight lift of her chin. "That was Mr. Crampton's contribution, Miss Mundy. You said yourself you passed him on the road as you left the ranch. Mr. Conklin, having driven south would logically not have seen him. In any case, he arrived back at the house just in time to witness Melody's 'second demise.' He simply hid, and waited, until he saw Stephen Slade drive away. And it was then, he went about the grisly and appalling task of inserting the arrow into the hole that had been made by Slade's bullet."

Crampton, oblivious to all, licked a dehydrated lip and belched dispassionately. His crapulent expression reflected only the relief that had come with the gastric eruption.

Conklin glared at the grounds man with intense loathing. "But, why? For the love of God, *why* . . . ?"

"By the terms of your late father's will, Mr. Conklin (which I will never live long enough to fully comprehend), this bibulous reprobate had been bequeathed an annual annuity of approximately eight-thousand dollars, until the ripe old age of seventy-five. That is, unless both principal beneficiaries (yourself and Melody) should predecease him."

"Yes, I know, but —"

"But, Mr. Conklin, that was the *key*. If given that unlikely circumstance, the will granted a proviso of commutation which, in layman's terms, was the right to receive the annuity in one lump sum, rather than have it doled out to him in small amounts over the next thirty-six years. Crampton, of course, was delighted by the death of one beneficiary, and he reasoned (if we may be permitted to use the word that loosely) that should you also be eliminated, he would have effectively removed both legal obstacles to his right of commutation, in one fell swoop. The bow and arrow charade was perpetrated in the belief that you would be suspected *al principio*, as the only person on the ranch capable of killing Melody in that particular manner. He undoubtedly saw you, in his besotted mind's eye, being charged, held for trial and, eventually, executed, in place of the real murderer whom he believed to be Slade. Slade, he knew, could never pose a threat to him without putting his own neck in a noose."

Conklin was staring at Crampton with his mouth open. "Incredible," he breathed.

"What he actually stood to gain, Mr. Conklin, was thirty-six years of

eight-thousand per, or, two-hundred and eighty thousand dollars, in one lump sum. Almost enough to buy a small brewery."

As Helen Mundy was led silently away, the other officer moved into the room and tapped Stephen Slade on the shoulder. "Follow me," he said flatly, and turning to Crampton, "you, too." Mark could not repress a smile as he watched them leave, with Crampton bringing up the rear, carroming off both sides of the door as he stumbled through it.

In the meantime, Conklin had risen to his feet. He approached the podium with his western hat gripped knuckle-tight in his ham-like hands.

"Lieutenant," he faltered, "I — I'd like to apologize — I didn't realize —"

Lieutenant Carruthers offered her hand to the rancher with a forgiving smile. "It's a big man, Mr. Conklin, who can say he's sorry."

When finally they were alone, the Amazon turned to Mark almost shyly. "I haven't thanked you yet, for the Valentine," she said, warming him with a smile that was worth roughly two years of his pension. "I'm not too sure, though," she added, "whether I'm being hallowed — or hassled."

"Don't you?"

The Amazon gave him a long searching look. When their eyes met, she said softly, "And then again, I guess I do."



"I do believe you're right, Watson.
Someone is staring back at us!"

There it was: the ultimatum. Pay up or expect to be seriously injured. Augie knew that you didn't plead with thugs. You ran. But first he needed money, and that meant he had to commit another crime!

Strathmore's Flight

by JERRY JACOBSON

AS THE SIRENS OF POLICE CRUISERS WAILED ALL AROUND him, Augie Strathmore sank further into the brick recess that was the rear fire exit for Obert's Marine Supplies. He was cowering in Post Alley, a half-block behind Commercial Avenue, the street on which Obert's Marine Supplies fronted. The cops were looking for a male maniac in his mid-twenties who, in broad, Saturday daylight and in the full view of scores of pedestrians, had lopped off the head of a parking meter with a length of steel pipe pulled from a trash can set at the curb, and run off with the decapitated head under his arm. More an act of rage than one of pure thievery, Strathmore clutched the meter head tight to his chest. It belonged to him now! It was his! His!

The cruisers would be searching Post Alley any minute now. Strathmore spotted a Dewey Dumpster halfway of the alley. It was painted blue and white and was the property of Scarpelli's Wholesale Seafoods.

There seemed to him more honor in being captured on the run than cornered like a rat, so he took a deep breath and spun off up the alley in a sprint. He reached the dumpster and flipped back its lid. A foot down amid fishheads and butcher paper and crab shells he found a brown paper bag, yanked it out and jammed the meter head into it. On his way back to his room at the Reliance Hotel on Beckworth Street he passed three cruiser cars, but none of them turned in pursuit.

The hotel's front desk was unattended. It was Memorial Day week-

end and Pulaski was an ancient vet of more wars than he could clearly recall, which meant he was watching the parade uptown and then would drop by Veterans' Cemetery and wander the forest of pale, white stone markers in search of buddies. Strathmore got his own key and went upstairs.

He wolfed a fistful of Oreo cookies and then set to work on the meter head with a hammer, a chisel and a screwdriver. Fifteen minutes later, the steel door to the coin compartment gave up the ghost, fell open and slid a handful of coins onto the bed. Strathmore's heart broke. He hurled the meter head into the bathroom, separated the coins and counted them. Fifteen quarters, eight dimes and seven nickels. A dime short of five bucks. He felt swindled, but not by the meter head. It was Marquardt who had swindled him, and the circumstances told him Marquardt needed a stern talking to.

BITTERLY, HE SNATCHED UP A DIME AND A NICKEL and stormed back down to the lobby. He plunged into the public phone booth, ripped the receiver off its post, jammed the coins into the slot as though he were stuffing them down Marquardt's throat and viciously punched out the seven digits.

"Benny Marquardt speaking."

"Marquardt, this is Strathmore."

"Augie, my boy. How's tips?"

"You stiffed me, Marquardt."

"How so?"

"The city changed the meter locks. All of them. The works. From Commercial to Benoit Avenue and from Pioneer's Square all the way hell out to Kilgore Street."

"I'm told they will do that from time to time," said an unperturbed Marquardt. "And I told *you* they are wont to do it, as well."

"I was casing the collection people."

"And just how long did you *spend* casing the collection people?" Marquardt wanted to know.

"A month. Sixteen collectors, forty square blocks."

"Oh, oh. Too long, Augie. Now, I sold you a perfectly valid meter key acquired by me at some risk and expense. But that key didn't come with a lifetime guarantee."

"I shelled out \$300 to you for that key, Marquardt, and it grosses me four-ninety. And that four-ninety I got beheading a meter with a piece of pipe on Commercial."

"Augie, you don't entirely understand. Those keys are expensive because *this operation* is expensive. A person in the Meter Collection

Division must be paid. An underground key-maker must be paid. And I myself must be paid for my ingenuity and risk. This is meant to be a profit-making venture, Augie. Just consider yourself fortunate to have been allowed in on the scheme."

Augie Strathmore slammed a fist down upon the steel telephone table. He felt the little finger of his right hand sprain.

"And now the city is changing the locks," continued Marquardt, "and we must begin all over again. Now Augie, when you came to town six months ago, it was not precisely to a parade with ticker tape in the back seat of a nifty convertible with the mayor on your right hand. You arrived, as I recall, on a freight train in the dead of night. You had your baggage on your back, your pockets empty and all the prospects for winning of a guy playing jacks with a square ball."

Augie Strathmore sighed. He wasn't awfully fond of someone forcing his life to flash before his eyes.

"You came into town without contacts, without marketable skills and without capital," Marquardt was finishing in his ear. "And you are an orphan, which makes you four times cursed. You were caught walking from an all-night convenience store in the possession of five ham and cheese sandwiches, a quart of milk and a package of disposal razors for which you failed to pay. It was you who contacted Bosetti, the bail bondsman, who came across the street to the city jail to hear out your sad tale. He showed you a great deal of understanding and compassion, went your \$500 bail and additionally got a loan officer of Kasminski's Loan Company to advance you the sum of \$300, with the vigorish set at a very reasonable fifty-percent per month."

"So I could give the \$300 to you for a parking meter key that didn't work."

"Because you dallied and reconnoitered when you should have been plying your trade," said Benny Marquardt. "Augie, it appears you are not to the manner of the criminal born. I harken your memory back to six weeks ago, when you were provided with an excellent burglary scheme. You were loaned an automobile and some profession burglary tools and told to stake out the parking garage at the Civic Center on evenings when the opera and ballet were being performed. You were to note the automobiles of elderly couples who were formally dressed and bound for those events, elderly — it was explained to you — so that you would not encounter children or other relatives at their homes. You were to learn their addresses from auto registrations found inside their automobiles, drive to the homes and remove from them expensive possessions and artifacts. You then were to bring these items back to me and receive a fee for your work."

"I told you I didn't like the idea of robbing old people," Strathmore told him.

"Yes, you told me. And I told *you*, Augie, that you are a young man who cannot afford to pick and choose. You have your back against the wall and you begin looking for someone to whom you can apologize for being in their alley. Yes, you are a special case, son. But I'm not turning a cold back to you. Let me work on something more appropriate to your peculiar ethics. I'll get back to you."

PUTTING UP THE PHONE WAS FOR STRATHMORE a bit like detaching a lifeline. The city had emptied out for the weekend, he had on balance noisy money and not soft money and twelve percent of the city's working population was searching for work and he was at the rear of that horde getting trampled to death. He felt like the last human to get the message and had missed the last plane load escaping the planet.

He would have felt total abandonment at that moment had it not been for the black limousine sliding into view through the hotel's grimed front window. To Strathmore it seemed to glide up to the curb like a snake, calculating and slithering and looking to be fed. Its driver spent a minute behind the wheel and then came out on the street side. He stood a full two feet above the car's top. He slid a pair of sunglasses up onto his forehead slowly and checked the lettering on the front window against a page in a small notebook. In a moment the sunglasses went back down and the notebook disappeared inside a pocket of the black, silk suit coat. As the man came around the front of the limousine, Strathmore got an odd feeling and quickly leapt behind the front desk and began perusing Pulaski's day-old racing form.

The stranger entered, took a quick assessment of the lobby and then strode up to the desk. Strathmore snatched up a pencil and made a mark next to the name of a horse in one of the races, hoping the stranger wouldn't note that every horse in the form had gone under the wire at least twelve hours earlier.

"You the manager, bright-boy?" came the low voice, indicating he wished no words to be minced.

"Temporary," Strathmore muttered. "Pulaski is up watching the parade and waving his flag."

The notebook came out again. Narrowed eyes searched for the proper page.

"You got a tenant here at the Reliance name of Augie Strathmore?"

That the man did not know Strathmore on sight caused his fingers to relax their grip on the pencil. "Augie? Yeh. Young kid. Heavysset.

He's in 306. Upstairs. Third floor. Keeps to himself pretty much."

The stranger looked at Strathmore curiously. "Yeh, I think they still keep 306 on the third floor, upstairs in most hotel buildings. This Strathmore kid, is he in his room?"

"He went out. About an hour ago. Race track, I think he said."

The stranger's eyes slitted again as they peered beyond Strathmore's right shoulder. "His key doesn't seem to be in his box."

"Yeh, he takes it with him a lot. The kid don't have a whole lot of trust in other people."

"Like to get a look at his room," said the stranger. A crisp twenty dollar bill slid onto the desktop and Strathmore was tempted to smother it. "Well, Pulaski, he's got the master keys. He don't trust nobody, either."

The stranger began tapping the tip of his nose with the twenty and then slipped it back into a pocket.

Strathmore swallowed once and then said, "Of course, if it's something important, you could write him a note and slip it under his door. It'd be safe there because ain't nobody got a key except Augie and Mr. Pulaski and they ain't here."

"You got a valid point there, bright-boy."

The stranger walked across the lobby, got comfortable on the ratty couch, brought out the notebook again and began to write. Three pages and five minutes later, he ripped the sheets from the notebook, folded them and took the elevator upstairs. A minute later, he reappeared, smiled menacingly at Strathmore and left the hotel.

It was somebody from Kasminski's Loan; Strathmore didn't need an old building to fall on him to guess that. His loan was four months overdue; both interest and principal. And it hadn't been to Strathmore's benefit to tell Kasminski's representative that Strathmore was splurging what little money he had at the track.

AFTER A MINUTE, THE BLACK LIMOUSINE SLITHERED AWAY from the curb, but Strathmore didn't leave his post behind the desk. He got another odd feeling that the stranger would circle the block and come back for another look. Sure enough, two minutes later the limousine turned up again beyond the front window. It slowed. The driver ducked his head down. Their eyes met and hooked briefly. Then the sedan moved off again.

Strathmore could almost guess at the contents of the note. Kasminski wanted his money back and he wanted it back in the next twenty minutes. Strathmore was stifling his cash flow and Kasminski was angered over that. And Strathmore wasn't blaming the loan sharks,

either. When people wanted lemonade and you had lemons, you opened up a lemonade stand, got rid of as many competitors on your side of the street as possible and then set your price.

Five minutes had passed and the limousine hadn't returned. Strathmore left the desk and went up to his room. He locked his door, picked the note up from the floor, took it to his bed, sat down and began to read.

Mr. Strathmore, I am a representative of Kasminski's Loan Company. As his collection agent, I have been instructed to collect on your loan of \$300, plus interest fees of six months in the amount of \$900, for a total debt of \$1,200.

Had you made more serious attempts to pay the vigorish, your loan might have been extended. As it stands, however, Mr. Kasminski indicates he wishes total repayment by six p.m. this evening. That includes interest plus principal, Mr. Strathmore.

If payment cannot be made at that time, I am empowered by Mr. Kasminski to take certain steps regarding your delinquency. Please be in your hotel room at six p.m. this evening when I call.

Strathmore let go of the note pages and watched them flutter like dying birds to the ragged, undulating terrain of his bedcovers. Well, there it was: the ultimatum. Pay up or steel yourself to be seriously injured. *Certain steps.* That meant what Kasminski's representative was empowered to do was something very akin to what Richard Widmark did in a movie to an old lady in a wheelchair at the top of a rather long, steep ramp. Or some variable that was even worse.

Augie Strathmore was still a young man, but he had lived long enough to have acquired instinctive knowledge about some things. And one rule of life he knew instinctively was that you didn't plead with thugs. That was like forcing cards out of the deck, or spitting on a judge, or telling a motorcycle cop his sunglasses looked like they were bought with a dime and a boxtop to Battle Creek, Michigan.

Into his mind now entered the aspect of flight. There was little he would be leaving behind. Not a girlfriend, not a relative, not an employer, and nothing in the way of worthy possessions. He had the

mohair sportscoat and the Hawaiian sport shirt with the flaming red flowers and blue leaves. The ten-transistor portable radio. The three-piece, ivory-inlaid customized pool cue he'd won in a nine-ball tournament at the Pompeii Tavern in Pioneer's Square. He couldn't be traveling lighter with his pockets filled with helium. It made no sense now to hang around and wait to be Kasminski's representative's stationary target.

THE LOBBY WAS STILL EMPTY WHEN HE REACHED IT. Pulaski must be having trouble locating all the grave markers in his advancing age. He had liked Pulaski, who had let him slough off on the rent from time to time and had even slipped him meal money when he noticed Strathmore's bones beginning to show. He would write him a nice, long letter explaining his abrupt departure when he reached a destination that was safe.

The sunlight out on the street was blinding. When his eyes adjusted to it, he looked for the black limousine. It was nowhere in sight. There was nothing like a flying start.

He walked west on Beckworth, feeling strangely free, with no past and no present and with his future a long way off. His future didn't trouble him. He was only twenty-three. Down the road for him at some point in time there would be a girlfriend or several, later on a wife, and a job or career in which he could find interest and take pride. He could see well beyond his being adrift just now, shoot through to the other side of the present where the quarters were not so close, the air a little thicker to breathe, and the wall not quite so near his back.

He had gone four blocks on Beckworth before he realized what he must look like to other people on the street. There he was, bopping along in that mohair coat and that screaming Hawaiian shirt that would keep you awake nights if it wasn't hung behind a closed door, swinging the radio and the boxed pool cue freely in tune to his stride. He looked like some street burglar who'd just made a two-bit score and was walking a little too fast to be entirely innocent of everything! A cruiser would nab him in an instant, run him back downtown, and then he would have to start in with Kasminski all over again!

He reached Federal Avenue and the porn houses and pawn shops. He nipped into the first pawn shop he came to, smiled nicely at the clerk and took the first price quoted: five dollars for the radio and forty for the cue. Somehow he felt decriminalized. It was a good feeling.

THE BUS DEPOT WAS JUST FIVE BLOCKS FARTHER WEST. At one o'clock in the afternoon, on the day after the city had emptied,

the waiting room looked like someone had just called a fire drill. A soldier in dress khakis slept full out on a bench. A woman was feeding three young children candy bars, and across the room two young lovers were locked in an endless, kissless embrace.

Strathmore checked the schedules. Then he checked the fare listings. His forty-five dollars wasn't going to get him across the street, let entirely alone across the state. His stomach began to growl with discontent. He hadn't eaten anything all day but that handful of Oreos. He went into the depot's cafe and ordered a tuna sandwich and a glass of milk. It was gone in an instant, and so was a buck-thirty. He felt on the verge of committing a crime, but hadn't yet made up his mind to it irrevocably. Loan sharks shouldn't have the unalienable right to corner a debtor with as much ease and violence as they did.

He walked out of the depot and stood opposite the cab stand. Five cabbies sat languidly behind their steering wheels reading paperbacks and the ball scores. In the near distance Strathmore could hear marching bands still playing, their trumpet blasts and drumbeats bouncing off the sides of buildings like a hundred handballs. This part of town was desolate and silent.

If it was to be a crime, then it would be a small one, a delicate and polite one. In and out with a fistful of bills and some small change, with an apology. Across and down the street from the depot the marquee of a tavern captured his attention, The Video Palace. He recalled being there once. It was only a midtown beer bar, but the night he was there it had been swamped. Mostly young males, they'd stood shoulder-to-shoulder, bellied up to scores of video and pinball machines. The noise had been deafening. Futuristic beeps and squawks, the roar and whine of missiles as they tracked invading targets, the reverberating explosions as the missiles found the advancing alien enemy. The parking lot north of the tavern was empty now, but that night an automobile had been crammed into every last inch of space. Meteor Time Warp, Missile Command, Astro Blaster, Galactic Battle Zone, Universe War IX.

A thought was building in Strathmore's mind, a brainstorm trying to associate itself. Slowly, slowly, it emerged. What did that electronic world run on? What kept it fueled? What fed the bomb blasts and missile hits and laser shots? *Quarters* did! The interplanetary maniacs went through hundreds, perhaps thousands of quarters in a single evening, coins the bar had to keep on hand to exchange for a dollar bill each time some Flash Gordon came to get more ammunition. Taverns generally did their banking early in the day, lining up all their ducks for the late-afternoon and evening onslaught. Strathmore's

mind's eye tried to count the number of cigar boxes bulging with rolls of quarters and could not. His way seemed clear.

He crossed the street and began closing the distance between himself and the tavern. His mouth began to dry up, like a small puddle of water under a relentless sun. He wondered if the bartender would have a pistol. It was a strong possibility. Well, if he did, Strathmore felt his resolve would just vanish. He told himself he would just turn and bolt for the door and hope for the best.

The tavern's front door was sheeted in copper. The sun's reflection off it made it seem aflame. Strathmore drew a deep, fearful breath, turned the knob and pushed inside.

THE PLACE MUST HAVE JUST OPENED FOR BUSINESS. No customers sat at the bar, and in the dark depths of the narrow tavern only two of the seemingly hundreds of pinball and video games were in use by two young men in their mid-twenties. The bartender was down at the far end, filling a cooler with stubbies and quarts. Where Strathmore stood there was a green felt countertop and a cash register. Things were looking up; he could be out in a flash. Strathmore put his right hand inside the pocket of the mohair jacket with two fingers extended.

The bartender finally spotted Strathmore in the distance and stopped his work. His eyes were not fearful and his chubby face seemed relaxed.

"What can I get you, bud? Schooner?"

Strathmore lifted the jacket pocket with his hand. "Quarters. Gimme all your quarters and nobody'll get hurt."

The bartender's eye brows lifted significantly. "Is this a robbery?"

Strathmore tried to make his voice lower, as though he were chewing on a mouthful of gravel. "Well, it ain't an invitation to the dance. Now, come on! The quarters, all of 'em!"

There was something ironic in the bartender's expression that Strathmore could not read. He hit a button on the cash register and the cash drawer flew open. His hand made a quick scoop. He laid the small mound of quarters on the felt countertop.

"There you go, pal. The big score."

Strathmore was livid. "No, no! The quarters for the video machines! The cigar boxes! Come on, you go to the bank every day to load up!"

This was too much embarrassment for Strathmore to bear. The bartender was chuckling.

"Pal, we use tokens here. Machine tokens, which cost 25 cents each. Hell, *nobody's* going to keep \$2,000 a day in quarters laying

around so some street bandit like you can waltz in and hit for a big payday."

"Tokens?" Other words were trying to force themselves out of Strathmore's mouth but his lips seemed to be a roadblock.

"And is that your gun?"

"What?"

"Your weapon, your piece. What is that, a new model? A finger gun?"

Strathmore closed his eyes in shame. He had his hand out of the pocket of the mohair jacket, the two-finger barrel pointed at the bartender.

"You haven't got your thumb cocked, pal. Look, you just hang right there a minute while I call the cops and we'll sort this thing out, okay?"

His face burning, Strathmore backed for the door. It seemed a light year away. Finally his back hit it and he fell out onto the sidewalk, actually *tumbled and fell!* He scrambled to his feet and began to run. At the middle of the block he found an alley and darted into it. A Chinese cook in a white apron and cap was dumping garbage into a can, and Strathmore nearly bowled him over. He kept on churning his legs, the string of Oriental expletives trailing behind him like the tail of a Japanese kite. He reached the next block, pulled up to a walk and tried to catch his breath. Well, at least he didn't have a pistol to get rid of. And at least he didn't take the fistful of quarters on the countertop. Trying to explain a crime like that in prison to other convicts wouldn't invest him with much dignity or pride.

HE WALKED WEST, INTO THE FACE OF THE AFTERNOON SUN. He wasn't hearing any cruiser sirens. Maybe the bartender was just choosing to forget the entire incident. Maybe he was just now regaining control after a fit of laughter, and deciding to just chalk it all up as one more good story to tell a few regular customers.

He needed a plane ticket out of town. One-way. To a major city with a high population density. He nipped into a phone booth, called the airport and asked the cost of a one-way ticket to San Francisco. Second-class, with no frills. He was told \$183, with a stopover in San Jose, and left at 5:53 p.m.

It was just a bit before two o'clock, which meant he had roughly three hours in which to come up with the price of his fare, evade the police if they were looking for him now, remain out of the clutches of Kasminski's representatives and get out to the airport. He supposed he could hustle some pool with a house stick at one of the downtown

taverns or poolrooms, but that notion would probably be nothing more than a waste of time and pool chalk. Big money hustling pool almost never was made until after the sun went down. Besides that, Kasminski was well aware Strathmore knew his way around a pool table and would have any number of goons searching for him in that direction once they'd learned he was now on the run and had no intentions of returning to his room at the Reliance.

That reduced his options quite a bit. He wasn't thinking very strongly about attempting another robbery. He recognized he just wasn't very adept at that sort of thing. He could cast his pride into the wind and panhandle, but he imagined even the best of them couldn't pry that much money out of the hands of total strangers in just three hours. Police cruisers were still passing him on the street at intervals, but they didn't appear to be showing the slightest bit of interest in him. Fleetinglly he thought of getting himself purposely arrested for some petty crime or other. But that would only get him to jail and that was painting yourself into the tightest corner of all. They would be waiting for him when he got out, Pulaski for his back rent and Kasminski for his loan or a piece of Strathmore's hide.

The steady, oppressive heat of the sun and the sting of its glare was beginning to give him the worst headache of his life, his present circumstances notwithstanding.

He was walking on Talbot Street, where the city's better hotels and restaurants were rowed. Men dressed in sharp, three-piece suits and carrying expensive leather attache cases were continually on the move, getting in and out of cabs and entering and emerging from office buildings, chasing after one big deal or another. An outsider to this world, Strathmore felt a bit like someone watching a movie about big business and high finance starring Gregory Peck and Walter Pidgeon.

Three blocks out of the glut of activity, he came up on a cocktail lounge. Below the marquee hung a small, fringed banner promising air-conditioning inside. Strathmore and hard liquor didn't get along all that well with each other. After two drinks, his mind began to see the images of objects and people as though they'd been swept together with a broom. But his throat was desperately crying out for something icy and cold and wet.

Inside, the lounge was as empty as the video games tavern had been. Strathmore paused near the entrance next to a monster potted rubber plant. Two men in business suits sat together at the bar just inside the door. They were salesmen, because within Strathmore's earshot, one of them said to the other, "So I put a move on Crystal

Doucette in Accounting, you know? Only I don't know she's old man Bradley's private stash, so the next thing I know Bradley's got me switched to the western counties in Arizona. Yuma and the Mohave Desert and all of that. Now I know how Rommel probably felt when Hitler gave him Africa."

Wordlessly, Strathmore passed them and took a seat at the bar near the set-up rails. The bartender had an ear bent to a baseball game coming over an expensive-looking short-wave radio. Strathmore ordered a vodka collins: light on the vodka and heavy on the ice.

TO BE ABLE TO SPEND A FEW MINUTES IN SAFE REFUGE sipping a cool drink was luxurious. The pounding in his head began to subside to a dull, intermittent pulsing. He asked the bartender to add more ice to his drink and the man complied without argument.

His physical and psychological health were improving, but his financial condition still remained desperate. All his life he had been unaccustomed to making money in any great amount and, while his was still a young life, he still hadn't acquired any special knack for it. He wondered how millionaires became so and whether any of them began their adult lives without a dime to call their own like Strathmore. Probably a lot of them, he thought. Hell, Horatio Alger wasn't the first self-made man and he wouldn't be the last. Placing yourself into the system was the biggest hurdle, getting your foot inside the door as the salesmen were fond of saying. He had a foggy, half-formed idea of going to Hollywood to try and become an actor in one of those daytime television soap operas. He'd read somewhere that they made an incredible amount of money for doing such banal, insignificant work.

Thinking of salesmen, Strathmore let his eyes slide to his left down the bartop where the salesmen who'd made the ill-fated move on Crystal Doucette still sat talking with his friend. He hadn't noticed before, but the two salesmen seemed to be playing some sort of gambling game. They both had irregular stacks of bills in front of them on the bar, money which changed hands and stacks each time one of them won or lost. Strathmore's palm began to perspire and his heart started to race. Could he be that brazen? That foolhardy? Both men looked bigger than he was. And they sat on their stools like boxers.

With what sounded to him like a quiver in his voice, Strathmore asked the bartender where he could find the restrooms.

"Out near the front door," he answered, idly, still stooped to the radio. "Take a jog to the right. It's down the hallway."

"Thank you."

He gulped the remainder of his drink for courage. What was a

handful of dollar bills to a couple of salesmen who likely made more in commissions in a week than Strathmore made in a year? He got up and walked casually down the length of the bar. As he approached, one of the salesmen glanced up. Strathmore smiled at him and continued walking, waiting for a massive heart attack to drop him in his tracks.

In the restroom he took a few deep breaths to still his pounding heart and then washed his face with cold water. Three people in the bar knew what he looked like, in particular the bartender because Strathmore had called attention to himself twice, when he'd asked for more ice in his drink and when he'd inquired about the direction of the restroom. But if he could somehow cover his face, that might confuse them just enough. He yanked a fistful of paper towels from the dispenser. They were too small. He tried tying two of them together, but they tore. The act struck him as the very story of his life.

Now that he thought about it, he really didn't need a mask. His fingerprints were on the cocktail glass, marking him indelibly as a criminal should he decide to go through with his plan. Face and fingerprints be damned! If he could make it to the airport and onto the plane to San Francisco undetected, that was all that really counted.

But standing there talking about it was a bit like talking himself out of it. "August Strathmore," he coached, in a low voice, "either you do it or you don't do it. Make up your mind but get off the can."

As a robbery, it didn't turn out half bad at all. Remembering to keep his hand in the pocket of the mohair coat this time, he more marched than walked back out into the lounge. The salesmen were still gambling, and the bartender continued to listen to the ballgame on the short-wave radio, his back turned on the salesmen as his ears hung on every pitch.

During it, not a word was spoken. Strathmore merely lifted his right coat pocket, snatched up the two uneven stacks of bills on the bartop with his free hand, turned on his heels and walked from the lounge. The salesmen seemed too stunned to yell out. And the bartender hadn't witnessed a thing.

HE WALKED BACK UP TALBOT AT A BRISK PACE. Soon the crowds thickened, and he was lost in pedestrians. It had all been so impulsive, and it had all been so easy. The bills were in the lefthand pocket of the mohair coat. He hadn't even glanced at them when he swept them up and jammed them into the pocket, but he now remembered something about their texture. They were crisp, new bills. Not old ones. New ones. Once more his heart began to pick up its pace.

Then, they weren't one dollar bills, they were bills of bigger denomination!

Three blocks south of Talbot, Strathmore found a service station and ducked into the men's restroom. Nervously he pulled the bills from his pocket and began separating them by denomination on the top of the toilet tank. When he'd finished, he collapsed on the closed seat in a combination of shock and relief. He counted the bills again to make certain his eyes were not deceiving him and then hurriedly slipped them into his wallet. Six fifties, six twenties and nine tens! Five-hundred and ten dollars!

He got up with a feeling his knee bones were floating in their sockets. They were outside the restroom, of course, waiting for him en-masse — patrol units, field commanders, tactical weapons teams and a priest with a bullhorn. That was fully in keeping with the present down-cycle of his life.

He stepped from the restroom, resigned. And then his fallen spirits took flight and soared. There was no one, absolutely no one. Cars drove leisurely past, dwarf poplars beautifying the street swayed in the light breeze, people strolled and shopped. Strathmore looked up into the face of a high sun and saw it as the warm face of some long forgotten relative.

It was just two-thirty. He was rich and he was not being pursued and he had three hours to make it to the airport. A prince could not more blessed be.

He really felt he should celebrate. He felt owed. A block up the street, in the direction of Talbot, was the striped awning of a small French restaurant, one he'd passed on the way to the gas station. It was called the Chez Paul, had a complement of small tables set out on the sidewalk, and advertised that it opened at eleven a.m. and served lunch and dinner. It wasn't a snooty French restaurant where Strathmore might have had to suffer the embarrassment of being loaned a necktie by the maitre d' before he could be seated. The Oreos cookies and tuna sandwich seemed to him a million meals into his past.

When he reached the restaurant, Strathmore still felt like basking in sunlight. He took a seat at one of the sidewalk tables, took off the heavy mohair jacket and draped it across the back of his chair. A waitress in a frilly, summer dress came out and served him a glass of water and a miniature loaf of French bread in a little woven basket. Strathmore picked up the wine card and ordered a bottle of white wine, the name of which he forgot as soon as it passed his lips. The wine came nicely chilled. He sipped at his first glassful and ordered scallops at \$6.95 and Oysters a la Gino for \$9.50. He surmised the oysters were

being cooked by a chef named Gino or were being prepared in accordance with his recipe and he wondered how good a French cook could be who had an Italian name like Gino. The tablecloth was crisp linen, with prints of ink drawings on them, and it made Strathmore feel he had taken a table at the Moulin Rouge that had just been vacated by Toulouse-Lautrec, who only minutes before had been doodling on it.

His seafood came, along with a spinach salad. The waitress told him the dressing was a vinaigrette. It didn't look as though he had nearly enough food to eat, so he ordered Boned Breast of Capon at \$12.45 and Stuffed Zucchini priced at \$4.50. He also ordered the Baked Tomato, simply because he'd never had one and felt he should gain all the continental expertise he could.

It was all very nice: the food, the wine, the soft breeze playing across his face, the polite attention of his waitress, the passing parade of the strollers and shoppers. He was truly astounded at how quickly human fortunes could change. He ordered a second bottle of wine.

IF THERE WAS ANYTHING THAT INTRUDED ON STRATHMORE'S sense of freedom and well-being, it was the man who appeared at a table three removed from Strathmore's, sometime between the delivery of his Boned Breast of Capon and his zucchini and baked tomato. He took a seat facing Strathmore and ordered only coffee. He might have taken more serious note of the man's arrival were it not for the fact that just then, he had been pondering how to return the money to the salesmen from whom it had been stolen.

It could have been Strathmore's imagination, or his lingering sense of guilt, but each time he chanced to look over at the man, the man seemed to be looking over at him. Once, the man smiled back at Strathmore, but his smile seemed forced and contrived. He wore a dark business suit, which suggested to Strathmore that he was some midtown business executive. But it did seem inconsistent to him that the man should travel so far off the beaten path just for his coffee break.

Strathmore's feeling of unease grew as he finished the last of his chicken and poured out the last of his wine. The man's coffee seemed an absolutely unimportant thing. He had scarcely touched it since it arrived at his table. Instead, the man seemed to be paying more and more attention to Strathmore. And that was not good.

How good it was not began to develop just as Strathmore centered the baked tomato in front of him for assault. He saw the man rise from his table, straighten his suit coat and then begin to head in Strath-

more's direction. Indeed, he walked directly up and sat down at his table, without begging his pardon or asking to do so. He smiled and seemed unperturbed and Strathmore didn't like the looks of it at all.

THE MAN REACHED INTO AN INSIDE POCKET and produced a thin, black wallet. He flipped it open on a gleaming, gold badge of a city police detective. "I thought I'd wait until you finished your meal. It seemed the polite thing to do."

Strathmore put down his fork and dabbed a linen napkin at the corners of his mouth. "Yes," he said bravely, "the police. Has there been some trouble?"

"Seems there has been, yes," the detective told him. Strathmore had read the detective's name on his identification card sheathed in plastic next to his badge, but he'd by now forgotten it, as he had the name of his wine. "Downtown. At a cocktail lounge. Just a few minutes ago, as it turns out."

"Really," said Strathmore. "And what might that have to do with me?"

"Well, that's what I'm here to establish."

Just like Kasminski's representative, the detective had a little notebook, too. And a ballpoint pen. "Now, then. May I know your name?"

Strathmore squirmed a little in his chair. "Shouldn't I be told of my rights?" he asked.

"Only if you've been placed under arrest," the detective told him. "As of the moment, you are not under arrest. Now then. Your name?"

"August Strathmore."

"And where do you live, Mr. Strathmore?"

"Well, I use to live at the Reliance Hotel down on Beckworth."

"Then at present you have no address," said the detective.

"No, sir. I am at liberty, you might say."

"Do you have a job, Mr. Strathmore?"

"Well, I'm sort of at liberty there, too."

"I see. Mr. Strathmore, you'll pardon me for saying so, but for a man who has no job and no place to live, it would seem unusual you could afford this table of bacchanalian delights."

Strathmore wasn't familiar with the term.

"It's a festival of eating and drinking in honor of Bacchus, the Greek god of wine," the detective explained. "Sort of a classical orgy, something in the manner of what you've had here."

"I see."

"Fine. So, how are you able to afford all of this, Mr. Strathmore?"

"The racetrack," said Strathmore.

"Ah, a day at the races. Wonderful. and how much did you win?"

"Gee, I guess around five hundred. Something in that neighborhood."

"Something in that neighborhood," the detective repeated.

Strathmore nodded.

"Well, Mr. Strathmore, it appears we have something of a coincidence here. Because the amount of money you said you won at the racetrack is very close to the amount taken from two salesmen in the Boojum Tree Lounge about an hour ago."

Strathmore wondered how long he'd been twisting his napkin in his hands.

"The bartender had his back turned when the robbery took place," the detective continued, "so technically and legally he's disqualified as a witness to the crime. But the victims, they're another matter entirely. And while the physical description they gave of the robber was fairly vague, both men seemed in perfect agreement about his dress."

"His dress."

The detective flipped backward a page in his notebook. "Tan mohair sportscoat," he read, "and a Hawaiian sport shirt with red flowers and blue leaves. That seems to be pretty much what *you're* wearing, Mr. Strathmore."

"Really? I hadn't noticed."

"Mr. Strathmore, have you ever been arrested for a crime?"

"Once, yes," Strathmore answered softly. "I was caught taking food from a grocery store without paying for it. I was hungry."

"Just food?"

"And some razors. The disposable type. I needed a shave pretty badly."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

THE DETECTIVE NODDED. HE CLOSED HIS NOTEBOOK and replaced it inside his suit coat, along with the pen. "Now then, Mr. Strathmore. The victims won't be able to place right down to the dollar the amount stolen from them. But they *did recall* the bills were all fifties, twenties and tens, and that the bills were all reasonably new. New, crisp bills, Mr. Strathmore."

"Is that significant, sir?" Strathmore said, choking on his words a little.

"Yes, you could say *very* significant. You see, Mr. Strathmore,

the victims were playing liar's poker with those bills. Have you ever played the game yourself?"

"No, I don't recall that I have. What was the name of the game?"

"Liar's poker," the detective repeated. "And one of the rituals peculiar to that game is the way the bills are folded by the players. You see, Mr. Strathmore, the players build poker hands out of the serial numbers on their bills. And in order to do that, they quarter the bills so that one of the two serial numbers is facing them and the other is tucked inside so it can't be seen by the opponent. The bills you took from the bartop in the Boojum Tree Lounge, Mr. Strathmore, had all been used in the game. All crisp, new bills and all perfectly creased in quarters. May I have a look at the currency in *your* wallet, Mr. Strathmore?"

"I was going to find some way to return the money," Strathmore said now, fully painted as he was into his personal corner of grief. "You see, I had to get out of town, because I owe quite a bit of money to a man named Otto Kasminski."

"Kasminski's Loan Company?"

"Yes, sir. You see, I came here about six months ago and work was pretty tough to find and I haven't got any what you'd call marketable skills and . . ."

"I think I understand," the detective interrupted. "Getting started in a new place sometimes is as tough as dying without debts. And people like Otto Kasminski don't make things any easier. Well, let's toss a monkey wrench at him and see if we can't build a case against unlawful interest fees and a breach of the usury laws. What interest was he charging you?"

"Fifty-percent per month," Strathmore told him.

The detective told Strathmore handcuffing him wasn't necessary, and he told the manager of the Chez Paul that the city would settle the amount of Strathmore's lunch check.

"Aren't you going to put on your coat?" the detective said to Strathmore, as he indicated the back of his chair.

"Aren't you afraid I've got a pistol in it?"

"Well, normally I would, yes. But roughly two hours ago, someone dressed in a mohair coat and a Hawaiian shirt with red flowers and blue leaves tried to hold up a place called The Video Palace using his fingers for a pistol. You wouldn't have any specific knowledge of that robbery attempt would you, Mr. Strathmore?"

"Yes, I think I can help you out there, sir," Strathmore answered, the heaviness in his chest vanishing, now that his flight was over and he was back down to earth. ●

Felix hated Women's Lib, and he hated Women's Libbers even more, especially one in particular. There was only one way to deal with an enemy as insidious as this. Exterminate her!

Felix Culpa

by HAL CHARLES

FELIX HANNIBAL NOLAN COULD PINPOINT THE EXACT moment he began to dislike the *idea* of Woman's Liberation. For some reason he had been watching one of those inane award shows on TV. That damned female singer had won something or other. Instead of crying like an ordinary woman, she had launched into a marathon acceptance speech that ended with her thanking God, "for *She* makes all things possible."

The audacity!

And the exact moment he began to dislike the *reality* of Woman's Liberation was even easier to designate. On the opening day of the fall term, he found that Lynn Fermor, Ph.D., the new professor with whom he had to share an office, was — horror of horrors — a feminist.

Thirty odd years ago, after the world had made a desperate attempt to destroy itself, Felix had kicked around in limbo until, by accident, he had run into the GI bill. Slowly he became aware that The University dwelt outside the flow of time. Volumes of Shakespeare and Chaucer helped erase the painful images of London's rubble-strewn streets and bomb-shattered buildings.

Cloistering himself behind the book-lined walls had preserved his sanity, but gradually the outside world drew closer like an ever-tightening noose. McCarthy had attacked the idea of The University, the radicals of the 60's had temporarily taken it over, and just last summer his old friend and office-mate C. L. McSwain — seemingly unable to cope with the pressures — had put a bullet in his head.

No wonder then that mere dislike of his female officemate very quickly blossomed into the black flower of hatred. The first day of

classes he arrived to find her desecrating his office. Facing his illuminated page of *The Canterbury Tales*, Miss Fermor had hung a poster that depicted an Amazonic female with a pith helmet, chair, and whip subduing a muscular male in a lion-skin loin cloth. Its caption shamelessly read: I AM WOMAN, HEAR ME ROAR. Directly over his bust of Shakespeare was now suspended a planter with vines that crept down over The Bard's head so that he resembled a green-haired hippie. If it weren't enough that she didn't know the difference between an academic office and a greenhouse, when he lit up his Meerschaum, she coughed out a harsh, "I mind!" and tacked up a sign that glared at him in red letters: GET YOUR BUTT OUT OF HERE!

And the situation got worse. As Fall grew colder, it became obvious she had a master plan to drive him crazy. One morning when he pulled his vintage Buick sedan into the faculty parking lot, he couldn't maneuver into the last spot. He backed out only to see her wheel that washing-machine-propelled car into the slot, all the while smiling triumphantly. Then there was the office door she never closed. Her perpetual babbling with students made it impossible to do any serious research. The classroom was, after all, the place for students. Likewise, she refused to eat in the faculty dining room preferring to spread out her nuts and berries under the large sycamore tree like a squirrel. Where was her professional dignity?

LATE ONE AFTERNOON FELIX CONFRONTED EARL CATCHING, his chairman. Had Affirmative Action pressured him so much, Felix had asked, that he had been forced to hire her?

"Actually, we were very lucky to get Lynn on such short notice after McSwain's 'accident.' She could have written her own ticket anywhere."

"Because she's a woman?"

"Because she's good."

"I had to wait five years before getting my first seminar. You gave her one first term. A teacher has to pay *his* dues."

"She got McSwain's schedule. Besides," the chairman chuckled, "I remember a new teacher some years ago who literally stumbled over a manuscript that had fallen on the floor of the library's Collections Room. Seems to me he milked that one minor manuscript for six major articles and a literary reputation to boot."

"That's between you and me, Earl." Felix stormed out of the office, his horn-rimmed glasses almost slipping off his sweat-drenched nose.

If Earl didn't see things clearly, the rest of the department was

totally blind.

John Bigelow, the Poe specialist, had asked *Doctor* Fermor to do a study with him because she had some experience with computers. Poe would have come back from the grave to haunt them if he knew he were being collated by a machine. And even Elizabeth Pennworthy, one of the few women in academic circles for whom he still maintained respect, had suddenly taken to calling herself "Ms." Pennworthy.

But when his upstart officemate ventured upon public insult, he made a momentous decision. The departmental meeting that Friday afternoon in October had been routinely boring. As usual, Tolleson was snoring in his accustomed corner, Carsoni was trying to finish his latest book review, and Rodes — who had even come in his tennis outfit — sat nervously tapping his racquet on the floor. Then *she* served her bombshell: wouldn't it be beneficial if every member of the department taught a section of REMEDIAL English. Rodes dropped his tennis racquet. Why Felix hadn't even taught regular Freshmen English since the Sixties. At first he refused to dignify such heresy with a comment, but as more of his colleagues were seduced into her position, he took his stand.

"If a student can't meet our established standards, he doesn't belong here."

"If a professor can't refrain from using sexist language, perhaps *he* needs a lesson in sensitivity. Besides, Dr. Nolan," she said softly, "we're a state school and must accept *all* students."

"Miss Fermor," he returned, "the use of the generic *he* is an accepted tradition. But more to the point, our duty as educators is to weed out the weak ones."

"With a little background help your so-called 'weak ones' might surprise you. Have you forgotten our first priority is to teach?"

Felix exploded. "I was teaching when you were playing with dolls." He paused. "You *did* play with dolls, didn't you, Miss Fermor?"

A few muffled snickers escaped from the back of the room.

"I don't see what my background has to do . . ."

"Your background has everything to do with it, you, you," he stammered, "you radical."

"Your kind was extinct long ago."

"BRA-BURNER!"

"DINOSAUR!"

When the histrionics died, the motion carried, 41-4. At that moment Felix Hannibal Nolan declared war.

HIS OPENING GAMBIT WAS A SNEAK ATTACK. He swooped into

the office, destroying her poster before she arrived. He ruined her communications system by circling behind her Japanese car and snapping off the aerial. Employing the once-used fifth column tactics, he sabotaged her creative writing efforts by capturing some of the recently-penned poems carelessly left unguarded.

But she retaliated. One day his ashtray vanished. The next he walked into the office to discover a long-haired student of hers making up a theme — at his desk. And teaching in the classroom immediately before him, she always left the blackboard littered with assignments in which she substituted obscure female poets for prominent male writers.

The evidence was overwhelming. Her career seemed dedicated to irritating him.

The witch had to go.

That very morning Felix began his campaign for her dismissal. On the strength of his friendship he appealed to Earl. Couldn't she be let go? But his chairman, claiming that he had received nothing but positive reports on her classroom performance (what else would he hear from those enamored idolaters?), refused. Likewise, the Dean offered him no satisfaction.

Thursday evening Felix nursed his frustration, and a brandy, before the fireplace at his club. The Caesar Society was one of the few bastions of male exclusivity. Even those men's gambling clubs he'd once enjoyed in London were allowing female members. Andy Stone, whom he'd served with under Bull Donovan and who was now president of Intertext, Ltd., listened with concern to the entire story, then commented, "Too bad Miss Fermor isn't employed by Intertext. We'd ship her off to our field office in Antarctica and let her explain Affirmative Action to the penguins."

Their laughter was interrupted. The two oaken doors into the Reading Room burst open.

It was Lynn Fermor.

"Miss! Miss!" commanded the major domo, "the Caesar Society forbids women to enter."

"To hell with the Caesar Society!" she barked.

All eyes turned to the sacrilege.

"Nolan," she shouted, her accusing finger seeming to fly into his face, "how dare you try to get me fired. I promise I'll get you first, and believe me, I have ways, you worm."

She left the shellshocked society as suddenly as she had arrived.

Felix came to an immediate and inescapable conclusion — **THE ENEMY HAD TO BE TERMINATED.**

WHAT REMAINED WAS THE SELECTION OF THE METHOD to dispatch her down the road to dusty death. Like the scholar he had become, Felix consulted his sources. Perhaps in the manner of Beowulf he should hack off her head with a magic sword. No, that was too direct, and magic swords had gone the way of the all-male military. Well, in the manner of Claudius, who killed Hamlet's sleeping father, he could pour poison in her ear. Impossible — the woman never slowed down enough to rest. Maybe a la Montresor in Poe's "Cask of Amontillado" he could immure her in the catacombs. Unfortunately she lived in a high-rise apartment, and he knew absolutely nothing about mixing concrete. Alas, he decided, the business of murder was not as simple as literature made it out to be.

Pacing his study, he waited upon the muse to inspire him (was there a muse of murder?). He thoughts were interrupted when he stumbled over his book bag hastily set near the door that afternoon. Sprawled on the floor, he found himself face to face with the captured enemy papers. He adjusted his thick-lensed bifocals and began leafing through the drivel she passed off as poetry. The more he read, the more he wondered how she could claim kinship with Milton and Dante. About to relegate her personal gobbledygook to its rightful literary niche, the bottom of his trashcan, he was suddenly struck by the opening of one of her Rod McKuen-like ramblings:

without the beacon of your love
I run myself aground. Gutted and stranded
I force my life to leak from me

"Eureka," he screamed, knowing the buoyancy Archimedes once felt upon the moment of his discovery.

THE NEXT MORNING FELIX LAUNCHED HIS FINAL OFFENSIVE. When she went to her ten o'clock class, he placed a large bottle of pills conspicuously atop her desk and invited John Bigelow to the office on the pretense of discussing the spring schedule. In the midst of their conversation, he let slip his worry over his officemate's recent depression, asking Bigelow not to mention the Valium on her desk. At the faculty lounge later that morning, he allowed Tolleson to pry out a confirmation of the information passed on by Bigelow. That afternoon in the library he assured Rodes, Tolleson's officemate, that poor Miss Fermor was perfectly content — *professionally*.

At Mrs. — Ms. Pennworthy's — certain the rumor of his enemy's

depression had taken root, he took tea and the opportunity to launch Phase Two. Because she seemed so concerned, because she was after all a woman, and because she could be trusted not to break a confidence, Felix reluctantly admitted his suspicions to his hostess that their new colleague's melancholia might stem from the unstable condition of an AFFAIR. While helping Pennworthy pick up her crumpets from the carpet, he described both his officemate's late afternoon phone calls (frequently resulting in tears) and notes written in a masculine hand that she had seemed so hesitant to open. Frankly, he confessed, keeping her *affaire de coeur* to himself had been a burden he was now glad to share with a long-time confidante.

Pennworthy didn't disappoint him. After spending the morning constantly denying knowledge of Miss Fermor's ill-fated affair, he spent the lunch hour categorically refuting the consensus that her lover was a graduate student, and the afternoon refusing to comment on the supposition of some that her lover was a colleague. Then he set into effect Phase Three.

HIS CHAIRMAN HAD SAID OVER THE PHONE that after supper would indeed be a good time to drop by. Everything was going according to his timetable. Marge Catching greeted him at the door and led him through the labyrinth of children's toys, piles of folded laundry, and dirty dinner dishes that she apologized for not having gotten rid of. Earl was fooling with something in his desk drawer when Felix ceremoniously closed the study door.

"Thanks for coming, Felix. I guess I don't have to tell you we've got a problem."

"So I've heard," said Felix with a you-should-have-listened-to-me smugness.

"You're Lynn Fermor's officemate," he began. "Although you two don't get along, you're in a position to know more about her than anyone else in the department." Earl paused. "In our business, reputations are very important. We wouldn't want anyone needlessly hurt."

"Our duty to the department is more important than our personal feelings."

Earl looked him in the eye. "Then there's only one important question. Do you, ahem, have any idea with whom she is having her affair?"

At that moment Felix, knowing that Earl thought the rumor truth, shared the elation of victory with Achilles, Aeneas, and Henry V. He weighed his answer carefully.

"I'm as positive of the identity of her lover as I am that she's having an affair."

"I don't think our department could take another tragedy so soon after what happened to C. L., your last officemate."

Felix rose to his feet and assumed a serious pose. "I must confess that even I've felt the same frustrations with students who can't write a sentence, grants for anything *but* solid scholarship, colleagues who prefer tennis to Tennyson. Sometime I am very out of joint with life. Perhaps C. L. found the only sensible solution for an old scholar." Then, as he had seen Olivier's Hamlet do to punctuate a point, he turned his back and bowed his head. "We can only hope that such a young woman will not allow her depression to, how should I say, to cut short a promising career."

Inwardly Felix applauded his powerful soliloquy. Earl must have been equally touched, for without a word he ushered Felix to the door.

He went home and treated himself to an epicurean meal. To go with the sirloin, he broke open the bottle of vintage wine he had been saving for such an occasion. Raising the glass, he toasted C. L., who, now dwelling with all the old masters, was doubtless smiling down in approval of his old friend's charade. He rolled each morsel around his mouth, knowing there was no need to rush; after all, it was common knowledge that distraught poets always took their lives at the tolling of midnight.

AT PRECISELY 11:30, PHASE FOUR BEGAN. As the elevator lights flashed the floors, he checked his coat pocket again — they were all there. Stepping out on the sixth floor, he was certain that The Bard wouldn't object to a slight revision of his balcony scene.

The modern-day Juliet seemed surprised to see him, but after a moment let him in.

"What do you want?" Miss Fermor asked, drawing her peignoir around her as if she were suddenly chilled.

Felix smiled. He removed his bifocals and began wiping them so as to appreciate fully his imminent victory.

"I came as soon as you called," he said calmly.

"Called?" she questioned. "I didn't call you."

"In your state of depression you felt I was the only one you could turn to."

"I don't know where that silly story about an affair started."

"It's a shame I couldn't talk you out of it." He backed toward her balcony and reached into his coat pocket. "All these poems of yours about unrequited love and death."

"Give me those!" she demanded, moving toward him.

Still retreating, he began tossing the sheets down one by one. "Without the beacon of your love," he read and let another leaf drift downward.

She followed him as he knew she would.

"I run aground."

"You have no right to read those."

"I force my life to leak from me." He backed on to the balcony.

"Are you insane?" she said nervously, continuing to advance.

"Empty, I can not go on." They were both standing on the small, flower-lined balcony now. "Quite an eloquent suicide note, Ms. Fermor."

"You *are* crazy!"

One push and the enemy would be vanquished. Felix grabbed her shoulders and wheeled her around. He was shocked by the tautness of her muscles.

He neither saw the bathrobed figure emerge from the living room behind him nor the flowerpot descending toward his head.

VAGUELY AWARE OF A CLOCK STRIKING, FELIX TRIED TO RISE to his knees. The world was a blur. Where were his glasses? A few feet away a familiar masculine voice rose in anger.

"We have to do it."

"But," she warned, "we've already killed one person."

"Listen, we sacrificed so much to be together. If I hadn't . . . eliminated McSwain, you wouldn't have his job."

"Do you think the police will buy another suicide?"

"What choice will they have when they find this tape?"

Felix, extremely groggy, couldn't believe he was listening to the very words he had rendered so dramatically earlier that evening. As his own voice concluded, "Perhaps C. L. found the only sensible solution for an old scholar," Felix realized what they planned.

"And I do love you so, Earl. It *is* the only way."

Unseen by the pair, Felix pulled himself to his feet. The very rumor he had so cleverly created was in fact true. Still dazed and unable to find his glasses, he bolted for what looked like the front door and escape.

His foot caught on the track of the sliding-glass door. Out of control, he hurtled head-long over the railing.

"How do you think he found out about us?" she asked.

"Just like everything he's ever done," answered Earl, "he probably just stumbled across it."

The gorgeous blonde was waiting upstairs in my office, and I was down in the bar nursing a double and wondering what a shamus like Mike Shayne would do in a case like this. Then I got it!

Alias Roscoe Brent

by JAY FOX

THE FADED GOLD LEAF ON THE DOOR SAYS, *Roscoe Brent* — *Private Investigator*. I read it and smile as I walk in. I'm Brent. But not Roscoe.

My first name is Dildford. That was my father's name, and his father's before him. Dildford Brent is a perfectly good name, solid and dependable, good for wheat farmers, which they both were. Not so good for a hard-boiled private eye. I mean, can you imagine a Dildford Shayne, Dildford Hammer, or Dildford anything else?

Roscoe, of course, is criminal slang for *gun*. At least it used to be. I've been in the business a long time. If you called a gun Roscoe today the average crook wouldn't know what you were talking about, and the editors of most magazines and paperbacks would laugh all the way to their box of rejection slips.

I say *most* because there is one rather out-of-date, slightly pretentious mystery magazine where you might get away with it. But I shouldn't go on about that. I can't afford to offend anyone.

Why would a hard-boiled private eye worry about offending a mere magazine editor? A woman at that. Because like my name isn't Roscoe, I'm not a private eye. Not even soft-cooked. I write mystery stories.

The sign on my office door helps put me in the mood. So does the battered slouch hat I wear, and the shoulder holster. In the latter I carry what looks like an Army-issue .45 — an injection molded plastic

replica that is frighteningly realistic. I can almost fit my little finger down the barrel.

But a hollow plastic gun, no matter how detailed, is far too light to be convincing. It doesn't have the heft. It didn't hang right in the shoulder sling, so I weighted mine with birdshot until it matched specifications for the original.

Then it rattled. Roscoe Brent could not walk — or even creep — by a baby carriage in gum-soled shoes without getting a smile.

So I sat down at my desk, loosened my tie, opened my shirt collar and got out the bottle I keep in the bottom drawer. It's library paste. I keep bourbon in the top drawer, but just for its aura. I don't drink when I'm working. Well, not much. I can't type worth a damn after I've had a few belts.

A short one wouldn't hurt. Then I load my gun. I pack the hollow handle with library paste thinking that might end the annoying rattle that bothers me now even when I'm sitting down. And it works! I should too. Where the hell was I? Oh, yes — Sapter Chix.

THAT'S WHEN THE BLONDE WALKED IN. Really! I blinked twice and she was till sthere. And I mean, she was a *blonde*! She was blonde all over. Oops . . . I also write porn when the crime field is slow, and sometimes I forget which I'm doing.

I don't know if she's blonde anywhere but the top of her head. She was wearing a long, dark mink coat, buttoned and belted as though her beautiful body needed protection. And it probably did. She looked frightened. Very frightened. I could see fear in her fawn-like eyes. (I get paid by the word, and I *never* forget about that.)

"Are you Roscoe Brent?"

"I'm Brent." I can't lie to such a pretty face.

"The private eye?"

"Ah, well —"

"That's what it says on the door," she reminded me.

"Yes, I know." Maybe I can't cype, but I can still read. So I'm trying to think how to explain being half sloshed in the middle of the morning, sitting in my office with my hat on, wearing a gun that has paste leaking out of its handle.

"How did you find me?" I asked, stalling for time. Obviously I don't advertise as a detective in the Yellow Pages, and my office — such as it is — is on the fourth floor of a rundown old building where the elevator has been broken since 1963.

"I happened to be in the building —"

I stopped her with a doubtful stare. "In this neighborhood, only the

rats can afford fur coats."

"My husband owns the building," she said stiffly. "In fact, he owns the whole block."

"Aah, that explains it." When I think what that mink must have cost, I know why the elevator hasn't been fixed.

"He's been kidnaped."

"Good —" I spoke without thinking. Then I caught the look of hurt in her eye and added quickly, "— Lord!"

My eyes went up and down like the elevator used to. The blonde intrigued me. Except for the centerfold that ran with one of my off-color stories, she was the best looking woman I'd seen in months.

"It's awful!" she sobbed. Her whole body trembled.

I jumped up and gave her a sympathetic bear hug, as any good private eye would, and — damn! — I rubbed a big blob of paste across the front of her mink.

"Excuse me . . ." I tried to brush it off, but only succeeded in smearing it around. She warmed to my touch, and that *really* intrigued me. With a wry little smile I thought, I could get *stuck* on her . . .

"Can you help me?"

"Sure." I could wet a cloth in the john and —

"This ransom note came this morning."

"Oh, *that*." I took the note from her trembling hand, not knowing quite what else to do.

It said: IF YOU WANT YOUR HUSBAND BACK IN ONE PIECE GET \$250,000 IN SMALL BILLS. WAIT FOR OUR CALL. NO COPS OR WE KILL HIM!

The letters had been cut from newspaper headlines and pasted on on dime store paper. All different types and sizes, the lines not straight . . . it looked like something I might have typed late in the day.

"I can have this traced," I said. Then I remembered that it's phone calls detectives always have traced, and I didn't even know how to do that.

"I'll ask around on the street . . . make a few discreet inquiries." For a lady who can afford mink, you have to do more than just *ask around*.

"Stay here," I told her. "You'll be safe in my office." At least she'd be safe until I got back. All that soft, blonde hair really turned me on. And I knew to keep her hanging around, I'd have to do something like a real private eye would.

I WENT DOWN TO WALLY'S FOR A DRINK. To clear my head, and maybe sort things out. Wally's is the bar at the end of the block, in

a building also owned by the kidnap victim — if I could believe what the beautiful blonde had said.

Then it hit me. I didn't even know her name. Or his. I pay my rent to a property management company. Some detective! I sulked and stared into a double, trying to think what Shayne would do. I mean after he got his client's name

It had to be good enough to keep her around until I could ask her out to dinner. What else would a private eye do? I know . . . call good old what's-his-name, the friendly cop who always slips the shamus some vital clue.

But the only cop I know by name is the meter maid who regularly tags my car for overtime parking in front of the office. Then I remembered that fictional private eyes often don't have to *do* anything to get a case rolling. The crooks come to them — usually with a threat. Stay off the case, or else!

A thug is much easier to find when he busts into your office, or chases you down a dark alley with a gun. And the personal threat adds empathy. Your better private eyes seldom work for the money alone. Readers won't buy that.

It's to get the guy who killed his partner, or took a shot at him in the alley — or to save the beautiful blonde you just *know* the shamus will fall in love with.

But the blonde in this case had not been threatened with anything worse than library paste. I don't have a partner, and I've never been shot at, even in the Army. Writing Pentagon press releases isn't a likely way to win the Purple Heart.

"Want another?" Wally asked.

"Why not?" I didn't know what else to do. But wait! Bartenders help private eyes almost as much as friendly cops. And Wally was perfect for the part.

Wally is a big, ugly, mean looking dude. He could play in the front four on any NFL team you care to name. He could *be* the front four all by himself, except that Wally is meek as a lamb.

He wouldn't hurt a fly. Literally. He catches them in his cupped hands, carries them to an open window and says, "Be free!" But he does look mean enough to make a convincing threat.

"Wally," I said with a flash of inspiration, "you owe me a favor —"

"I do?"

"Well, yeah —" People *always* owe favors to private eyes. You never know why, exactly, but they do. "— er, for all the drinks I buy in here."

"You're a good customer," he agreed, but he still looked doubtful.

"It'll only take a few minutes."

"O.K., but I can't leave the bar until closing time."

That was a problem. People in stories seldom have other work to do. The bar wouldn't close until 2 A.M., and the blonde and her diligent protector were to be at home, hopefully in bed, long before then.

"Not even to audition for a part in an important TV show?" I asked after another flash.

"You're kidding!"

"No, really. They're doing a pilot based on one of my books. The producer is in my office right now — a beautiful blonde."

"Really?"

"Yes, and you'd be perfect as the villain!"

"Oh, yeah?"

I had him hooked. In five minutes I had him convinced. I wrote his script on a soggy cocktail napkin, gave him my plastic gun and walked back to the office while Wally was trying to memorize his lines.

"WE'RE DEALING WITH PRO'S," I TOLD HER. "Dangerous men." Inept amateur crooks are of little use, even to inept amateur detectives. "I think you'd better lie low for a while at my apartment —" My plots always get better in the second draft.

"All right," she said quickly.

That threw me. I thought it would take a lot of convincing. That's why Wally was supposed to come busting through the door, but he wasn't due for several minutes. I had to stall. "Ah, first we'd better see what we can do about all that paste . . ."

I got her coat clean, and still Wally hadn't shown. He's a nice guy, but not awfully bright. It must have taken longer for him to learn his few lines than I'd thought.

"Shall we go?" She brushed against me and flashed a kittenish grin.

"Er, no — not right now. I smell trouble." What I smelled was wet fur. Damn it, what could be taking Wally so long?

"Sorry I'm late," he said as he came timidly through the door, closing it quietly behind him. That was definitely *not* part of his script. I could only hope he hadn't forgotten the gun.

"Look out, he's armed!" I swung in front of her like a shield. Private eyes all act like they're bulletproof.

"He is?" she gasped. Wally still hadn't found the gun.

"Yes, he has a gun!" I said to jog him. God, I hoped he had a gun.

"Oh, yeah . . . right here!" He had his napkin script wrapped around the paste-smears grip. "I'm warning you sha — sham —

shamus! Stay off the case!"

When he was through, I made a dive for his arm as we'd planned. The blonde screamed, still scared enough to think it was all real.

I grabbed Wally's wrist, gave it a quick spin — and birdshot started running out of the gun barrel. It tinkled like rain on a tin roof. Wally stepped in it, slipped on the slick floor and went down with a sickening crunch.

"I — I think you broke my leg," he moaned. It was twisted beneath him at an odd angle. When I tried to straighten it out, he screamed louder than the blonde.

He was testing it, trying to stand when I heard her say, "Don't move!" She'd picked up the gun, and she had the phone in the other hand. "The cops are on their way!"

The cops? Oh, God . . . why couldn't she have been helpless like blondes in detective stories are supposed to be?

Three cars showed up, lights flashing, sirens wailing. It made quite a scene. But for it being mid-day, the whirling roof-top lights would have cast their eerie glow . . .

An ambulance came to take Wally away. His leg was broken, and the attendants complained bitterly when they learned they would have to carry him down four flights of stairs.

It took almost an hour to get everything explained, and all that time Wally kept threatening to sue in the worst language you can imagine. But for his broken leg, I think he'd have cupped me in his hands, tossed me out the fourth floor window and sneered, "Be free . . ."

At last I was alone with the blonde. I poured a drink and offered her one. She looked like she could use it. But the phone rang before she could make up her mind.

"Brent," I answered curtly.

"Lemme talk to Mrs. Ashworth," a gruff male voice said. At last I knew her name.

"I warned you lady, no cops!" The angry voice on the other end of the line was loud enough for me to hear. "Your husband is as good as dead!"

"I'm sorry," she said, but I think I felt worse about breaking Wally's leg. She managed a weak little grin when she'd put down the phone. "I'll take that drink now . . . if the offer is still good."

EVEN WITH ALL NIGHT TO THINK ABOUT IT, I couldn't come up with anything clever enough to save Mr. Ashworth. But I don't feel too bad about that. The cops couldn't save him. Neither could the F.B.I., and they didn't have a beautiful blonde to distract them.

They found him three weeks later, all the important pieces anyway. Alena took it well. I'd said her first name a lot during the course of that long first night.

Now you're smiling, thinking you know how it all worked out. I got the lovely Alena and all her former husband had saved on repairs as well, right? Wrong!

She liquidated all his holdings, and last I heard was living in Acapulco with her former butler, who I now suspect engineered the whole thing from the start.

I can't even make a good story out of that. *The butler did it* is worse than calling a gun Roscoe. Only one thing keeps the day from being a total loss. I've heard the new owner is going to have the elevator fixed.

THE ONLY THING HIS BULLETS COULDN'T CONQUER WAS...

HIGH SIERRA

starring **IDA LUPINO**
A gun-moll with a heart

HUMPHREY BOGART
A dreamer with a gun!

with ALAN CURTIS ARTHUR KENNEDY JOAN LESLIE HENRY HULL HENRY TRAVERS

Directed by **RAOUL WALSH**
A WARNER BROS. - First Nat'l Picture

Screen Play by John Huston and W. R. Burnett - From a Novel by W. R. Burnett



Humphrey Ingrid Paul
BOGART · BERGMAN · HENREID

A HAL B. WALLIS PRODUCTION

Casablanca

CLAUDE RAINS · CONRAD VEIDT · STONEY GREENSTREET · PETER LORRE

Directed by MICHAEL CURTIZ

Presented by **WARNER BROS.**





HOLMES MEETS WATSON in Charles Hutchinson's 1891 illustration for *A STUDY IN SCARLET*, published by Ward, Lock & Bowden; the famous scene takes place at the University of London Hospital, where young Stamford (in the middle) introduces Holmes to Watson.

Richard was gone, but there were still a few loose ends to take care of — like committing suicide, for instance!

Saying Good-By To Richard

by SUSANNE SHAPHREN

I LOOK IN THE MIRROR FOR THE SIXTH TIME since I awoke to find the sky gray and you gone. The dark wood and rich colors of your furniture are reflected. Images of your paintings are just where they belong, but something is missing.

There is no long chestnut hair without your strong hands to play with each strand. No green eyes without your deep brown ones to gaze into lovingly. No trace of a body without your magic fingers to define its curves and secret places. No Sylvia at all without Richard.

More brandy in the mug. This way it isn't really drinking before noon, just strange coffee that's dark and gives warmth without tasting like coffee at all.

The brandy blurs the memory of our argument, the Second hang-over distorts time. Have you been gone a day, Richard? Two? A week? No matter.

You'll be back. You'd never abandon your paintings. Never.

Sinking into your soft leather chair, I try to conjure up Richard, insert loving words between the lines of your heartless farewell speech.

The chair is cold and slimy without your body curving around mine. Everything is icy and dead without you. Good-by, Richard.

I SHOULD HAVE GUESSED YOU WOULD HAVE SEEN TO ALL the details. You brought exactly the right number of sturdy cardboard

boxes for my clothes and 50% of the communal knickknacks we collected over the years.

The Salvation Army number is neatly printed on the memo pad by the phone. A kind-sounding man promises to have someone here before three and thanks me in advance for my generous contribution.

You thought of everything, Richard. You knew I couldn't bear to live with memories of what we had together. So considerate of you to disappear and give me this time to think.

So kind of you to remind me I didn't need to return the key; you'd already arranged to have the locks changed. So efficient of you to wait till I'd paid the month's rent before you told me it was over.

I think that must have been what made me rely on you, your sense of timing and ability to handle all the pesky details.

Just as you took it upon yourself to relieve me of the burden of my virginity. Just as you helped me spend most of my father's estate. Just as you helped me escape the rat race of med school.

Listening, always listening. Waiting. Habit now. I still expect to hear you telling me what to do, how to act, which thoughts are worthy of thinking.

Unlike repairmen, the charity man keeps his word. The remnants of my life disappear with quick precision and a mumbled, "Thanks, Lady."

Still no Sylvia in the mirror, but suddenly I know exactly what to do. Good-by, Richard.

THE APARTMENT MUST BE CLEAN, MY MOTHER'S WHITE glove standard clean. Scrubbed and disinfected and virginal.

I put clean sheets, rich gold satin ones, on the bed. There's even a bottle of your favorite wine chilling. One last time, I will do as you command.

Lavender drifts out from the bathroom and fills the darkly masculine apartment with an exquisitely delicate scent. Soon.

The knife is yours. Mine is gone. That huge gleaming security blanket that made me feel safe all those nights you had to work late, the weekends you were out of town, has vanished into thin air. Packed away in one of those charity boxes halfway across town? I was never any good at details.

Don't worry, Richard. You can wash the knife and make it good as new.

There should be a note, but you supplied all my words and thoughts too long for that. I rummage through the trash to retrieve that gaudy lipstick you gave me.

The cold metal tube fits perfectly in my hand. Words glide smoothly, effortlessly, across the mirror. "Good-by, Richard."

EVERYTHING IS READY NOW. EVERYTHING BUT ME. I can't. You know how I am about pain. Lord knows you needled me often enough about my never being able to muster the courage to get my ears pierced and wear my mother's diamonds.

That's why you pawned the sparkling stars, to remove the threat of pain. This can't possibly be what you want of me.

But it is; isn't it? You lived my life long enough to know it couldn't end any other way. This must be what you want. It's my one and only talent, Richard. Doing what you want.

There! It's done. The blood is bright, bright red. It clashes with the pale apricot of my robe. Stupid Sylvia, can't even color coordinate her own death without you. Good-by Richard.

NOT ENOUGH BLOOD, NOT NEARLY ENOUGH.

I remember now. That's what the nice warm bubble bath is for. To draw out the blood, float my life away.

Warm and dark and quiet, almost like being back in the womb. Drifting away on a sea of dreams.

Good-by, Richard. My first love, my last. You were good, the best. You told me that often enough, proved it one last time before you disappeared.

Wait! You were the only. I have no basis of comparison. Is there still time to make it with the doorman? A deliveryman? Some dude perched on a barstool at Jimmy's? Silly Sylvia, you should have planned this more carefully.

IT'S TAKING TOO LONG. THE WATER IS GETTING COLD. I'm getting tired of the images my memory keeps dredging up. The first time you kissed me. Our first night together. The first time you drank too much and humiliated me in front of our friends.

Damn you, Richard! The very least you could have done is leave me enough memories to die happy.

I'll probably catch my death of pneumonia before I manage to bleed enough to turn the water crimson.

... the phone. Shut up! I'm very busy trying to commit suicide. No, it could be something important. Might be Richard . . .

Careful now. Mustn't drip on the nice clean floor. Towels for the water. Towels for the blood. Hurry.

"Hello."

The voice is deep and sexy like Richard's. I tell him exactly what he should do with his six free dance lessons. Good-by, Richard.

I WAS NEVER ANY GOOD AT DETAILS. There must be one dress I forgot to pack away, one pair of shoes.

Money in the sugar bowl. If I take half, my half, there's only enough for the subway. First class this time. The lady will leave just as she arrived so long ago, by cab.

One last glimpse in the mirror before I go. Sylvia is there, all five-feet three-inches of her. A little pale, a little damp, more than a little scared. Smiling Sylvia? Singing Sylvia!

What have I forgotten? Oh, yes. Those other boxes, the small soggy ones that are beginning to smell in the bedroom.

Back and forth to the incinerator. Good exercise. Wonderful way to clear the fog in my mind. I even remember what happened to my knife now.

Good-by, Richard

IF YOU KNOW WHAT'S GOOD FOR YOU

**YOU'LL BUY
MIKE SHAYNE
NEXT MONTH**

**AND
EVERY
MONTH**



OR ELSE!

Inspector Les Trade knew that only one man could help him solve this case — the famous Clement Boore!

The Pun Detective & The Danny Boy Killer

by JON L. BREEN

IT WAS TOO GOOD — OR PERHAPS TOO OBVIOUS — A JOKE to pass up, although it put a laughing face on a very grim business.

The five victims were a cab driver, a barber, a waitress, a hat-check girl, and a bellhop. All had their throats cut, and in each case a handful of loose change was found somewhere on the body. Naturally, the newspapers dubbed the faceless fiend Jack the Tipper.

Even before the journalists seized upon the obvious play on words, Inspector Leslie Trade knew that he could only solve the case with the help of Clement Boore, the famed Pun Detective.

"We'll sort this business out," Boore assured him, languidly resting his jowls before the fire in a massive armchair. "I can recall many similar cases, one in your father's time in fact."

"Oh, really?" Trade replied with edgily feigned interest. His problem was here and now, and he had long since heard enough stories about his father's fabled career — Gregory Trade was a tough act to follow.

"Yes, indeed, it was that fellow who dropped a handful of cornflakes on each of his victims. One of the most devilishly cunning cereal killers of all time. But we got him in time. Now, this Tipper fellow. Any other clues?"

"Just one. He always hums 'Danny Boy' after his crime, as he slinks off. All of the people who've found the bodies have testified to that."

"He wouldn't hang around for a concert after if he didn't secretly want us to catch him, Les. You can bet that the humming of 'Danny Boy' is designed to give us a clue to his identity."

The slits closed over the Pun Detective's baggy eyes and he sang softly to himself for a few moments. Then he was ready to give the worried Inspector Trade instructions.

"I advise you to investigate every plumber in the city. Check their movements on the evenings of the murders and see if any of them have recently been offended by a member of the community who normally expects a gratuity. Also, you might check with every waiter, barber, bellman, etc. who might have had a recent run-in with a plumber. Can you do that?"

"Yes, of course. The Chief of Police has promised me all the men I need for this investigation." He looked at his watch. "We'll have a dozen men on it by sunrise. But why plumbers?"

The Pun Detective snorted derisively. "Surely that's obvious. You might also send your men around to all the pipe shops in the city, try to identify as many pipe collectors as you can, check their movements."

Trade leaped to his feet. "At once!" he cried.

"Also any Alaskans or oilmen who might be in the city."

"Alaskans and oilmen?" Trade exclaimed.

"Don't exclaim. Just do it. Get to the phone. I'll see if I can think of anything else."

The policeman dashed to the phone. The Pun Detective marvelled at just how much the nervous inspector reminded him of his equally jumpy father. Les Trade was Greg's son all right. Two of a kind.

AS HE WAITED FOR THE INSPECTOR TO RETURN, Clement Boore's attention was attracted to a headline in the evening paper, just below the nightly speculation on Jack the Tipper's identity. "Amusement Pier Nears Completion," it read. "World's Largest Calliope to be Feature."

At first it was the seeming anachronism of a new amusement pier that caught the Pun Detective's attention. Reading on, he felt that he had stumbled upon something big. The calliope, of course, could fit his theory, and it developed that the builder of the pier, Conrad Tractor, promised that in the gourmet restaurant to be opened on the pier waiters would be paid so well that tipping would be unnecessary, indeed forbidden! The comments quoted indicated the entrepreneur's strong bias against the custom of tipping.

If these newsmen read each other's stories, Clement Boore reflected, they could catch Jack the Tipper themselves without the need of police or Pun Detective.

Inspector Trade returned, reporting breathlessly, "I've got some of my best men on the case — Hubin, Lachman, Nevins, Shibuk, Briney . . ."

"You must be all tuckered out," said the Pun Detective, lifting his ponderous bulk from the chair. "But we have work to do. There's not a moment to lose, Les. Everything fits."

He explained quickly as they dashed to Trade's car. "But I don't understand about the calliope," Trade said dully.

As they sped toward the waterfront, Boore patiently explained. "He tried to give us a psychological clue to who he is by humming 'Danny Boy,' right? I could have had you check out everybody named Dan, Danny, or Daniel, but the rest of the first line of the song gives a subtler and more likely clue. 'Danny boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling,' the song goes. That's why I said to check out plumbers, oilmen, Alaskans, pipe-collectors — all connected with pipes. Now, a calliope is an enormous pipe organ. That coupled with Tractor's bias against tipping convinced me he's our man."

TRADE SKIDDED TO A STOP IN FRONT of the pier's entrance. A construction office was still open, and the pier was not yet open to the public. It was early morning, and the construction crew was not yet at work, but a light burned within the office.

Boore glanced at the first edition of the morning paper, which had just been placed in a rack near the construction office.

The headline screamed, "Pier Unsafe?" Under a picture of builder Conrad Tractor, the story revealed that three amusement piers built by Tractor in other cities had mysteriously collapsed, and the city was investigating the building standards used in construction of the local pier.

Before Trade could knock on the door of the construction office, a lone figure came sprinting out, pushing his way past the Pun Detective and his companion. The fleeing man, recognizable as Conrad Tractor, was running toward the end of the pier, where the giant calliope gleamed in the morning sunshine. Les Trade began to follow him, but the Pun Detective held him back.

"Let him do what he wants, play his pipe-organ. He can't get away."

Soon the haunting strains of "Danny Boy" came from the end of the pier, as the world's largest calliope gave its first and last performance.


By the second chorus, there were sounds of cracking wood, the musical explosion too great for the pier's faulty craftsmanship, and the sea claimed the huge pipe-organ and its creator.

"I guess it was him all right," said Les Trade. "He knew we were on to him and played that tune to let us know we were right. But I'd rather have caught him alive and had him face a jury."

"Don't worry about that, Les," said the Pun Detective. "He's been convicted by a jury of his piers."

BEETON'S CHRISTMAS ANNUAL

A STUDY IN SCARLET



By A. CONAN DOYLE

Containing also
Two Original
DRAWING ROOM PLAYS.

FOOD FOR POWDER.
By R. ANDRÉ

THE FOUR LEAVED SHAMROCK
By C. J. HAMILTON

With ENGRAVINGS
By D. H. FRISTON
MATT STRETCH
R. ANDRÉ

WARD, LOCK & CO
LONDON · NEW YORK
AND MELBOURNE

Senator Banner was puzzled. A perfectly healthy girl in a well-ventilated room had keeled over dead. She hadn't been gassed, shot, stabbed, poisoned, or strangled. And there wasn't a clue in sight!

Dressed To Kill

by JOSEPH COMMINGS

IT WAS GETTING LATE AT RHINELANDER COURT. Two people entered the house of Dr. Quincy Bacon. Switching on the lights, Georgia Bacon, the doctor's sister, and Lenny Weymouth entered the sitting room. Georgia was a dark beautiful girl. Lenny was a pink, chunky young man, almost chubby, in dinner clothes. He was the sort of fellow who was ready to jump into the fray at an instant's notice, but who easily broke under the strain.

As they entered, Georgia lurched unexpectedly. A look of mild astonishment came over her face. She pressed her hand to her forehead as she steadied herself against the apricot-colored club sofa. She thought she knew why she had staggered. She had been drinking. She slid off her heavy Persian paw wrap and let it fall limply on one arm of the sofa. Underneath she was wearing a tight-fitting white satin evening gown with a high neckline and tight wrist-length sleeves.

She was glad to be free of the wrap. "Lord, that thing's hot." At the other end of the sofa she sank down as if she had been drugged. "One more for the road, Lenny," she begged.

Lenny left his black felt hat on the telephone stand and ambled good-naturedly to the sideboard on which were the makings of mixed drinks. "Are you calling the shots, Georgie?" He started to pour Scotch into two glasses.

She giggled. "I lost count. What's one more or less?"

He fizzed soda into the glasses, making both drinks even. He

brought the glasses over to Georgia and held one out to her. "This's the dog that'll bite you."

She didn't reach out to take the glass. She passed her hand over her eyes. "I'm tired. I danced too much. Why should that make me tired? Life's getting me down. I'm getting old, Lenny. I'm twenty-seven."

"If you're hinting that I should propose again . . . Cheer up, honey. Don't get maudlin in your cups."

She lifted her eyes as if they were on lead weights. "I never did get maudlin, Lenny. But I feel like the very deuce tonight." She finally took the glass out of his hand. "You're nice, Lenny. I'm glad I picked you out for myself. When we're married —" She tried to stand up and made such a bad job of it that he had to assist her with a hand to her elbow.

"What'll we drink to, Georgie?" he said.

"You name it and I'll buy it, Lenny." Then for an instant she looked terrified. "I — can't — think . . ."

"Poor baby." He touched her glass with his. "Here's to you, hon: a long life and a happy one, a pleasant death and a sudden one, a good-night kiss and another one."

"Lenny! Not that!" She shuddered.

"What?"

"Nothing with sudden death in it."

"I'm sorry, Georgie." He leaned over the glasses and kissed her. She made the kiss linger.

Then she pushed him away with her free hand. "That's enough, Lenny. Your hat's over there."

A glimmer of suspicion dawned in his eyes, then faded out again. "The old brush-off, eh?" He shrugged lightly. "All right, if that's the way you treat your boy friends." He set down his glass, picked up his hat, started out, then turned for a last look.

"Dream about me?" she said.

"Of course, Georgie. I'll see you in church."

He went out.

She heard the front door close. The house was quiet in the night. She still had the glass in her hand. She seemed to be fascinated by it. She watched it curiously while it slipped out of her fingers and splashed the highball on the thick rug.

She swayed. "My God, what's the matter with me?" Helplessly frightened, she dropped back on the sofa. "It seems — seems to be wrapping its arms around me!" She lifted her hands to pluck feebly at the gown at her throat. "Lenny! Come back! Help me!" Her head rolled back and she closed her eyes. "Quincy! Quincy!" she moaned.

The clock on the mantel over the fireplace ticked on.
Finally her hands slid slowly to her lap and she sat quietly.
She had stopped breathing.

THERE WAS AN OPENING AND CLOSING OF THE FRONT DOOR. Dr. Quincy Bacon came into the hallway from the street. He took off his hat and overcoat, hung them in the hall closet, and, still carrying his medical bag, walked into the sitting room. Georgia's brother was distinguished-looking and self-confident. His greying temples gleamed in the lamplight. He set his bag on the end table and glanced at Georgia. He grinned.

"Back from the dance and all pooped out, Georgie?" He opened a humidor and nipped out a long cigar. "Well, Georgie, we beat old man Schuyler's pneumococcus pneumonia with penicillin, the sweetest cure I ever saw. Why, you should have . . ." He was in front of her, lighting his cigar. "Georgie, you're so beat you're not even listening to me."

She didn't answer. She didn't move.

He reached out and shook her. The way her head rolled made him shoot out his fingers to her pulse. He drew up startled, shocked. Then he tore a stethoscope out of his bag and examined her thoroughly.

He straightened up, a puzzled, anguish-stricken man. Slowly his self-possession returned. He saw the fallen glass on the stained rug at his feet. He picked it up. As he held it in his hand he heard the front door bang.

A man and a woman barged into the sitting room.

She was Cerise Bonnet, a French model, wearing tonight a char- treuse walking suit and a bizarre hat. She was a busty brunette, conscious every moment of her figure and her legs. She said in her rapid way: "Look at Quincy staring at us as if we'd been out all night together. No such luck, Quincy. I just met Rudy on your doorstep."

Rudy Hollis said with a vinegary smile: "Keeping you amused, Cerise, is not part of our business arrangement." He was her boss, the head of a fashion center called the House of Style. He was large, cynical, coarse-skinned, and impeccably dressed.

Fire flashed from Cerise's impudent black eyes at him. Then the fire-power was turned toward the girl on the sofa. "What's the matter, Georgie? Stewed again, honey?"

"Stop that, Cerise!" cried Quincy hoarsely. "She's dead."

"Dead!" echoed Cerise.

The world-weary mocking mask fell off Rudy's face. "Good God, Quincy, what happened?"

Quincy's mouth twisted grotesquely. "That's just it, Rudy. What is

it? I've examined her. She isn't injured. Her skin isn't broken anywhere that I can see."

Cerise breathed: "Perhaps her heart . . ."

"Nonsense," snapped Quincy. "She was perfectly healthy." He looked down at his pale supple fingers and found them trembling. In the lamplight he looked ten years older than when he had first come in. His eyes went to the glass he had picked up. "Poison . . ." He strode across the room, picked up the phone, and dialed. As he waited for the connection, he said to the others: "Lenny was with her all evening. He'll tell us what she drank —" He said into the phone: "Hello, Lenny? This's Quincy . . . Oh, Mrs. Weymouth. I have bad news: Georgie is dead. Yes. I must talk to Lenny . . ." He waited stonily for the other person at the end of the line to recover. "Not in yet? . . . Yes, Mrs. Weymouth, that's fine . . ." He hung up. "That was Lenny's mother," he said. "She's coming here after leaving word for Lenny."

"Quincy," said Cerise, "what are you going to do with — *her*?" She nodded her head at Georgia.

"Put her to bed." Quincy stooped over the sofa.

SOMEBODY STOMPED INTO THE ROOM BEHIND THEM with the delicacy of a pregnant rhinoceros. "Greetings, Doc, greetings!" said a bullfrog voice. All three of them wheeled around. "Hi, everybody. Say Doc, whatcha got for a bellyache?"

They all stared in disbelief at the whale-sized man in the doorway. He was United States Senator Brooks Urban Banner. He was massive with a white mane, black eyebrows, and ruddy jowls. He had his lucky white hat in his big speckled paws and he was wearing a sloppy frock coat, a string tie that had been trailing in his soup, baggy grey britches, and rope-soled shoes. The whole aspect of him was comfort. He was aggressive, practical, and not easily swayed by emotions, yet he swayed others by their emotions. He was big both in size and power and this bigness entitled him to approach his problems with the subtlety of a meat-axe.

Quincy said: "Who are —?"

"Senator Banner, folks," said Banner easily as if the whole world knew of his fame as a politician and a murderer-hunter — and fortunately for him most of it had. He cleared his throat. "Haaaak! I hate to break up your li'l Quaker meeting, but tonight I was the honored guest speaker at a clambake at the Odd Fellows' Hall and I made the mistake of eating some of the food. Something's giving me a stummickache something fierce." He gave his barrel-sized belly a consoling pat.

Quincy tried to say coldly: "I regret very much, Senator, I can't do anything for you tonight. My sister has just died and —" his voice splintered "— even if I knew how —"

Immediately Banner sensed the doctor's doubt and confusion. "Whatzis? Whatzis?" He skimmed his white hat at a chair. It missed and rolled on the floor. He let it lie there. He wasn't that particular. He trotted around in front of the dead girl. "You don't know *how*?"

Cerise said: "Quincy — Dr. Bacon — said that nothing hurt her, but she's dead."

"Ah?" The name interested Banner. "You say that's your sister? She'd be Georgia Bacon, the model."

"Yes," said Quincy dully. "She worked at the House of Style on Fifth Avenue for Mr. Rudy Hollis." He motioned at Rudy. "This is he."

"How-dee-do?" said Banner. He eyed Cerise frankly.

Quincy said: "Miss Cerise Bonnet, another of Rudy's mannequins."

Banner took her hand warmly. "Jellyrool, do I remember you! You were in last month's *Esquire*, posing as the French sexpot."

Cerise gave him her Christmas smile. "You have a wonderful memory for faces, Senator."

Banner's shrewd blue eyes frisked her as far down as the platinum chain on her ankle. "Anyway, let's say I have a memory. Haaak!" He pushed back the lapels of his frock coat and stuck his thumbs in fireman-red suspenders. He said to everybody: "If a crime's been committed, you're gonna have me camping on your doorstep 'till it's solved."

"I must do this," said Quincy. "It's the only decent thing to do." He gathered up Georgia's limp form and walked stiffly out with it.

Banner, his heavy eyebrows jerking, stared after Quincy. "He's breaking all the rules." Then he paced the rug with dynamic energy. "This's queer as hell." He squinted at Rudy. "What's the reason for this roundup, cousin?"

"Why are we here?" Rudy looked resentful.

"Yass!"

"We live here."

"I'm on the third floor back," said Cerise.

THE DOORBELL PELED. CERISE DARTED OUT TO ANSWER IT. She came back with Ann Weymouth, Lenny's mother. Banner's hard blue eyes narrowly gauged the big-boned woman with the obviously dyed brown hair. She was homely. Nothing she could do would change that.

Mrs. Weymouth said breathlessly: "Where's Dr. Bacon. Oh, I'm so sorry for him. It's a dreadful shock when someone so close to you takes off so suddenly."

"Where's Lenny?" said Rudy.

"I left a note for him." Mrs. Weymouth looked at Banner with a lukewarm smile. "I know you. You're Senator Banner."

Banner frowned. "Who's Lenny?"

"My son," she said.

Cerise said: "Georgie's boy friend." But the lift of her tailored shoulders ridiculed her own remark.

Rudy tried to explain. "They'd been out tonight dancing and drinking. Quincy thinks that maybe Lenny can tell us what Georgie —"

"If Georgie took poison," horned in Cerise.

There was an awkward pause.

Rudy said to Mrs. Weymouth: "Would you like to see her? Georgie?"

"No, please."

"While we're waiting for Lenny," said Banner, "lemme make my position clear. Once I was county sheriff of Manhattan, so this's right inside my tepee. Thunder's in my blood and murders is my meat. And this looks like —" He broke off. "You're not one of Rudy's clothes-horses too, are you, Mrs. Weymouth?"

"Lord, no. I do work for him though. I'm a seamstress."

They hadn't noticed the sound of the front door, but Lenny appeared in the room, running. "Mother! What's this about Georgie?"

"Something —" Mrs. Weymouth started to say.

Banner was inserting his bulk between them. "She died tonight after you left her. Brother Quincy thinks it might be poison. What'd Georgie drink?"

"Georgie . . ." Lenny stood quietly till he had gripped himself. "Drink?"

"You heard me, buster. The truth."

"She didn't drink anything."

"You're bucking against City Hall," warned Banner. "I said the truth."

"I mean we both drank the same thing. Drink for drink. That's God's truth."

"Nothing that tomato juice spiked with Worcestershire couldn't take care of the morning after, eh?" said Banner sourly.

Dumbly, Lenny nodded.

"Then . . .?" said Rudy, befuddled.

"D'you believe him?" said Banner. "If you do, then Georgie wasn't

poisoned." They all looked at him like lost children, and he glowered right back at them.

Lenny slumped on the sofa, his curly head in his hands.

Half-sympathetically, half-contemptuously, Cerise said: "After what I told you today, Lenny?"

Lenny shook his head. "I know — but when I was with her I couldn't believe it."

Mrs. Weymouth said suspiciously: "Believe what, Lenny?"

Lenny was silent, but his eyes scalded Rudy's pasty face.

Cerise spat: "I'll tell you, Mrs. Weymouth. Georgie was two-timing Lenny. With Rudy. I told Lenny."

Rudy rasped: "Why, you big-mouthed tramp, I ought to —"

Cerise's high heel twisted into the rug as if she were grinding out a cigarette. "You can't double-cross me either!"

"You!" sneered Rudy. "Get the hell out of my life! Who needs you! You're getting too broad across the hips to model any more of my clothes!"

Cerise screamed and lunged at him with her slashing scarlet fingernails. Lenny, jumping up, got in her way.

Lenny struggled to hold back the fury of her writhing body. "How much of that is true, Rudy?" he gasped.

Rudy slid sideways so that a table was between himself and them. "It's all true . . . But what difference does it make — now?"

Lenny raised on his toes as if to dive across the table, then he wilted like a paper napkin in the rain. "No," he muttered, "it doesn't make any difference."

Cerise pressed her warm body against Lenny. The fight was gone out of her too. "Come, Lenny, I need someone to get drunk with."

Mrs. Weymouth placed herself so that Cerise was forced to step back from Lenny. "None of them are worth breaking your heart over, Lenny. I never thought Georgie was good enough for you, dear." She put her arm across his shoulders. "The best place for you is home with me."

At that moment Quincy Bacon returned from upstairs. He was wiping fine sweat from his brow. "Lenny," he said.

Banner, who had been standing back watching and listening to everything, said: "He says there's nothing in it, Doc."

Quincy shook his head wearily. "I know. I used a stomach pump and made a hasty analysis . . . She didn't die of poison."

Banner said: "Now we have it. An invisible wound by an invisible weapon. These shenanigans have me chawing raw beef." From somewhere came the ghost of a sigh. There was a feeling of something

cold and deadly in the room. Banner puzzled over the expression on Rudy Hollis's face. Was it fear? Bewilderment? Or both?

"What we all need," said Mrs. Weymouth, "is a good cup of coffee."

"Fine 'n' dandy," said Banner. "I'll take mine spider-legged with a li'l brandy."

Mrs. Weymouth stirred herself to go.

Quincy said: "Please don't trouble yourself, Mrs. Weymouth. I want you to try some of mine instead."

"None for me, thanks, Quincy," said Rudy harshly. "I'll never be able to sleep." He turned to Banner, challenging him. "I'm going out for a walk. Try and stop me."

Banner didn't move.

Rudy went thumping out.

Lenny left with Quincy to help with the coffee making.

BANNER STARED THOUGHTFULLY AT THE RUG. "A perfectly healthy gal in a perfectly well-ventilated room dies. She hasn't been gassed, shot, stabbed, poisoned, or strangled. Now what's somebody gone and done? Somebody's found a new way of doing the dirty. And not a clue in a morgueful." He looked up and around. "Where's Cerise?"

Mrs. Weymouth was the only one left in the room with him. "She slipped out while you were talking."

"Copped a sneak, eh?" said Banner sadly.

There was a long worried crease between Mrs. Weymouth's brows. "Senator, several days ago I was invited to a wedding reception by someone who knew the bride slightly . . ."

"Huh?"

"After the ceremony the bride began acting strangely. She seemed to run down like a clock that needed winding. Suddenly she collapsed. The family doctor said she was dead — that the strain of the excitement proved too much for her weak heart. Her father disagreed about her heart condition, but the doctor overruled. I'm telling you this because *Georgie's death resembles that bride's!*"

Banner nodded and looked highly pleased. "The bride was Gilda Webber."

Mrs. Weymouth was surprised. "How did you know?"

Banner grubbed in one of his frock coat's marsupial pockets. "File 13," he said. He drew out a bale of newspaper clippings that could have gagged a hippopotamus. "And these are the mysteries, vices, and crimes of the month of October." Wetting his big thumb and using

the Philadelphia shuffle, he sorted through them. He held one up, glancing at the headline. "STRANGE DEATH OF BRIDE AT WEDDING SUPPER. *Last night the former Miss Gilda Webber, etc. and etc.*" He looked at the accompanying picture of the bride in her wedding gown. He suddenly frowned as he bunched all the clippings together again and jammed them back into his pocket.

Mrs. Weymouth said: "Doesn't it seem doubly strange now that —?"

Not answering her, he took a long Pittsburgh stogie out of another pocket and stuck it in his mouth. He trotted to the telephone stand, pawed through the phone directory, picked up the phone, and dialed. "Lo. Is Wardlow Webber in? Yass? Roust him outta bed, fraulein. I gotta talk business with him" As he waited he hummed a popular tune in a tone-deaf manner and chewed the stogie. "... Hallo! Webber? Senator Banner. What's so surprising about that? Yass, United States Senator Brooks U. Banner! Y'know where Rhinelander Court is? . . . Yass, turn right off the avenue near Morningside Drive . . . I gotta see you. I gotta talk to you about your daughter Gilda. Huh? . . . Oh, sure, sure. Life 'n' death. Cross my heart. I'll lay out the welcome mat . . . Mighty fine, Webber." He hung up.

THREE QUARTERS OF AN HOUR LATER BANNER WAS SITTING on the sofa slurping coffee from his third saucerful. Mrs. Weymouth stood holding a tray on which was a silver coffee service and several emptied cups. She said: "More coffee, Senator?"

"No thankee." He handed her his cup and saucer. Then he peered around. "Where're the other two?"

"Dr. Bacon is in his study. Lenny is in the library. He's smoking too much," she added fretfully as she went out with the loaded tray.

Banner grunted and got up. There was a rap of French heels in the hall and Cerise hurried in. She was carrying three sheets of large stiff art paper under her arm. She flung her handbag on the sofa.

"Where'd you go?" snapped Banner.

She said breathlessly: "I followed Rudy. He didn't go out to another woman, as I suspected. How disillusioned in him I am! I feel like tearing out someone's hair tonight. It'll have to be what's left of Rudy's. You'll never guess where he went. To an undertaker's!"

Banner bounced. "Which undertaker?"

"The window said *Pollard's Undertaking Home.*" She kept the art sheets hugged close to her body so that he couldn't see what was on them. "Rudy went in the back door. I sneaked up to one of the windows. He was talking to another man. Rudy sounded sharp. He was

saying: 'I'm asking you what happened to that dress!' Then the other man, Pollard, said: 'What dress?' Rudy said: 'Julie Underwood's.' He seemed greatly disturbed. Pollard was silent for a moment, then he said: 'She was buried in it, of course.' Rudy snapped: 'That's a lie, Pollard. I saw it tonight!' Pollard said: 'You're talking through your hat.' Rudy kept on in a dreadful tone: 'I tell you I saw it on a woman named Georgia Bacon!' There was a long pause. Then Pollard said: 'Clear out, Hollis. You're crazy. You've been hitting the bottle. You don't know what you're saying.' I backed away while they were still talking. Something, Senator, had been in the back of my mind all evening. Something I'd seen somewhere. Right then I knew what it was. I went to the front of the building and caught a cab. I got out at Rudy's on Fifth Avenue. I have a key and I went inside where he keeps all his dress designs on file in big steel cabinets. I hunted through them and found these three."

"Lemme see."

"Wait'll I finish, Senator. I had them under my arm and I was on my way out when a man's shadow came across the glass door. I ducked and hid. Rudy came panting into the file room. He went directly to the same cabinets I'd just been through and started to ransack them. He was so absorbed in what he was doing that he didn't hear me tiptoe out." She turned the designs around so that Banner could see them. "See? It's the same white satin dress that Georgie was wearing tonight!"

Banner took the designs from her. "When it comes to women's clothes, I can't tell a frill from a furbelow. But, butterfly, this's obviously the glammer gown Georgie was wearing. What'd Rudy keep mum for? Who's Julie Underwood?" Cerise shrugged her Parisian shoulders at him. "Get Quincy!"

"Where is he?"

Banner bellowed: "Hey, Quincy!"

Quincy ran in, startled. "Yes?"

"Where'd Georgie get that dress she was wearing tonight?"

Quincy said blankly: "I don't know. I'd never seen it before."

Lenny came in. "What's all the shouting for?" He grimaced. "Haven't you any respect —?"

"Lenny'll know," said Banner. "Lenny, where'd Georgie get that dress she was wearing tonight?"

"It was sent to her. This afternoon it came in a box from Rudy Hollis's. There was a card with it that said: *Please wear this this evening. From an admirer.* Georgie showed it to me. She thought I'd sent it."

"Where's the card?"

"Georgie tore it up and threw it away."

"And the box?"

"It must be still in her room," said Lenny.

Banner turned to Quincy. "Doc, skeedaddle in there, like a good scout, and fetch out Exhibit C." Quincy nodded apathetically and left the room. The front doorbell pealed. "See who that is, snooks," said Banner to Cerise.

Cerise was brisk about it. She returned with a shy-looking, bald-headed man with a large bay window. He twisted his hat nervously.

"How-dee-do, neighbor," said Banner.

"I'm Webber," said the man. "Are you the Senator who called?"

"Not a carbon copy, brother." Then Banner said to the others: "Mind if I have a private pow-wow with Mr. Webber?" He waited till Cerise and Lenny left. "Siddown, Webber." He took a fistful of stogies out of his pocket. "Segar?"

Webber sat down. "No, thank you, Senator."

Banner shoved them into Webber's vest pocket. "Save 'em for the election . . . Webber, I wanna talk to you about the mystery of your daughter's death."

Webber looked grateful. "There's a doubt I'd like removed from my mind, Senator. The doctor said it was her heart. There was never anything wrong with Gilda's heart."

"Excuse me," said Quincy from the doorway. He had a pasteboard dress box in his hands.

"Uh-huh," nodded Banner. He waited while Quincy glanced sideways at Webber, placed the box on the sideboard, and walked out again. Banner picked up the three designs. "See anything familiar?"

"Why," said Webber, "that's Gilda's wedding dress!"

"Gilda," said Banner with a sort of pounce. "I thought so," he muttered as he let the designs drop. "I got a newspaper pitcher taken of Gilda the day she was married. The dresses looked the same."

"What does it mean?"

"I know three gals who're dead who've worn the same dress!"

"Three!"

"Where'd your daughter get it?"

"From some dress shop."

"Was it Rudy Hollis's?"

"No. I forget the name . . . Wait. I have it on a billhead." He carefully drew out a wallet and took out a folded lemon-colored paper.

Banner took it from him and smoothed out the creases. "Lena Krasner," he read. "With address and phone number." He crammed

the bill into his junk-filled pocket. "G'wan, Webber. What happened to the dress after your daughter died?"

"I gave it to Mrs. Flowers, our housekeeper, to dispose of."

"What'd she do with it?"

"I believe she gave it to a Red Cross worker who came to the back door looking for donations."

"Was the Red Cross worker a man or a woman?"

"Mrs. Flowers didn't say."

"We'll make her say. I'll ask her." He dived across the room for the phone. "Does she live in or out?"

"Out. Sorry, Senator. She hasn't got a phone."

Banner was disappointed. "That's all for now, Webber. Good night. See Mrs. Flowers and scoot her over here toot-sweet. Yunnerstand?"

Webber mumbled good-night and waddled out like a duck in a thunderstorm.

BANNER'S HAND WAS STILL IDLING WITH THE PHONE. He dialed and listened to the phone ring again and again at the other end of the line. Finally a receiver was lifted. "Lena Krasner? So I woke you up. Such language! . . . My name's Senator Banner. I need you at Rhinelander Court . . . Hell no, this's not joke . . . Hey! . . . By thunder, she's hung up on me." He dialed again, another number. "Harry? Banner talking. What's on the fire? . . . Tell your wife you'll explain later. I need you more than she does tonight. Lissen. Pick up an old crow — she *sounds* like an old crow — named Lena Krasner. Her shop's at 74th and Park. Check her out and go to where she shacks. I want her at Rhinelander Court on the double. Don't let her hex you, Harry. Get her. Good!"

Rudy Hollis came into the room behind Banner.

Banner hung up and faced Rudy. Stepping to the sideboard, Banner picked up the dress box and tossed it at Rudy. "Is that yours?"

Rudy caught the box clumsily and turned it over in his hands. He was pallid and short of breath.

Banner flashed the dress designs on him. "Ever see these before? No use denying. Your John Henry is on the bottom of 'em." He let the designs sideslip to the sofa. "You saw *that* dress on Georgie tonight!"

Rudy shook himself like a wet sheepdog. "I noticed it. Certainly."

"Why didn't you speak up?"

"I couldn't make myself believe it was the same dress. It seemed impossible. When I realized it was the same dress, I was afraid of being accused of something and kept quiet."

"Who's Julie Underwood?"

Rudy jumped and looked at Banner as if he were a witch doctor. "How the devil —?"

"You're the one who's putting the cards on the table!" reminded Banner harshly.

Rudy swallowed. "Julie Underwood's a girl who died several weeks ago. Her family wanted her buried in a white satin dress. I designed it."

"Where'd that dress go?"

"To Pollard's Undertaking Parlor."

"You sure?"

"Positively. Mrs. Weymouth brought it there for me."

Banner was silent for a long moment, strumming his red suspenders. Then he spat one word. "Scram!"

TWENTY MINUTES HAD TICKED OFF ON THE CLOCK.

Banner had worried the stogie down to a wet nub. The front doorbell pealed. He lumbered out to answer it. In the doorway were Harry, an adenoidal young man, and a wizened old woman about sixty-five.

"Thanks a million, Harry. Stay and watch." Banner led Lena in to the sofa by the arm. "Make yourself comfy, Granny. Siddown."

"Who're you calling Granny?" snarled Lena. "I won't sit down."

"Now, now, Lena, there's nothing to be afraid of."

"Afraid? Who's afraid of you, you big walrus! Cut the comedy, mister, and lemme go back to bed. I gotta get up early in the morning. I gotta good mind to sue this young squirt for forcing me here. That's kidnapping."

"Kidnapping!" howled Banner.

"And you gotta hellova lotta nerve!"

Banner stood like a buffalo about to charge. "Yass, I got nerve. And I got the beef to back it up." He took the clippings out of his pocket. "You sell dresses."

"Suppose I do. Is that a crime?"

Banner found the clipping he was looking for. "This's a pitcher of Gilda Webber. Lookit the bridal gown. You sold that to her. No use saying no, cuz I got your bill of sale too."

"Why should I say no?"

"Where'd you get that dress?"

"What's that to you?" she rasped.

"Okay, I'll tell you. You got it from Pollard the undertaker. See, I'm wise." He watched her old face start to crack with alarm. "A fashion designer named Rudy Hollis made that dress several weeks ago for a dead gal named Julie Underwood, so's she could get buried

in it. Undertaker Pollard was in charge of the burial. *But Pollard didn't bury that dress with the gal!*"

"You can't pin anything on me," snarled the old witch.

"I can put more pins in you than a voodoo doll. Pollard gave that dress to you. You're working with him a garment racket, reselling clothes for the dead. Pollard would recommend your shop as a good one to a prospective buyer. You'd sell the cerements, then Pollard would take them off the corpses again before they went into the grave. You could sell one garment like that till it wore out . . . Lena! How many times did you resell that white satin gown?"

Lena, seeing defeat, stopped fighting. "A couple of times. But it was a mistake. No one meant to sell it to a live girl. I never meant to sell it to Gilda Webber!"

"Thanks!" said Banner sourly. He flapped his hand toward the door. "I'll be seeing you, Lena — in the police lineup."

Lena gathered herself together and fled. She bumped into a chubby grey-haired woman in the doorway.

The woman recovered from the collision. "Excuse me, Did someone want to see me?"

Banner threw out his arms toward her. "Mrs. Flowers, I could kiss you!"

Alarmed, the woman backed away. "No, sir! I never allow liberties with no strangers."

Banner chuckled. "No liberties, I promise you. Sit here. Fine. My good woman, you're involved in a murder."

"Me — in what?"

"Yass, you . . . And I know who the murderer is."

"I never killed anything in my whole life," Mrs. Flowers insisted.

"You know who the murderer is, too. We're gonna match answers and see if we both have the same one." He picked up the floor lamp and put it in a new position in the room so that the housekeeper's chair was in shadow. "Hey, Harry!"

Harry poked his long nose forward. "Yes?"

"Get everybody in the house into the front hall. Tell each one to come separately to the door of this room and look in and say: *Good afternoon, is the lady of the house at home?* That's all."

"Got it," said Harry. And he vanished outside.

"Mrs. Flowers," said Banner in deadly earnest, "you'll recognize one of these people, but not a yap outta you till I say so."

The housekeeper nodded solemnly.

Banner moved beside the sofa, into the light, and watched the door.

Each of the five people came reluctantly to the door and self-con-

sciously repeated Banner's words: Quincy, Lenny, Cerise, Mrs. Weymouth, and Rudy.

Then Banner glanced at Mrs. Flowers. She had a dead pan.

"Harry!" bellowed Banner.

Harry came tumbling in. "Yes, Senator?"

Banner beckoned him closer. "Send in . . ." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Then call the police."

Harry went out.

FOR A LONG MOMENT THEY WATCHED THE DOOR.

Mrs. Weymouth stood there. "Excuse me, Senator, I wanted to ask —"

Banner said: "Mrs. Weymouth, do you know Mrs. Flowers?"

Mrs. Weymouth said vaguely: "Mrs. Flowers?"

The housekeeper jumped to her feet. "Why, that's the Red Cross woman!"

In the grave silence that followed only the clock ticked.

"Mrs. Weymouth," warned Banner, "no ructions now. My lad is calling the police. They'll be in in a minute. They're coming to arrest you for murdering Georgie."

Mrs. Weymouth's eyes were like pale china. "Murder! Why should I kill the girl that my son wanted to marry?"

"For that very reason. So she couldn't get him. So's none of 'em could get him. You said you didn't think any gal was good enough for your precious Lenny. You wanted to keep him all to yourself. You admitted that much tonight. You got mother-love, all right — but it's all twisted around deadly-crooked in your mind."

She sank on the sofa and covered her face with her hands. Harry came in and stood behind her.

"The police're here," said Harry.

"Take her out to 'em, Harry," said Banner.

Sobbing, Mrs. Weymouth got up and went out with Harry.

Mrs. Flowers was jittering. "May I go now?"

"Yass," said Banner. She scurried away. He listened to the commotion in the hall. Then Quincy came in slowly.

"Is it all over, Senator? What killed her?"

Banner said: "The murder weapon was right here before us from the very beginning. It was the white satin dress. A dress that was as deadly to Georgie as a tommyhawk or carbon monoxide."

"I still don't understand. Did Mrs. Weymouth discover something unknown to science?"

Banner started to chuckle. "Nothing new. Fact is, it's as old as the

pyramids. It's *embalming fluid!*"

"Embalming fluid!"

"Georgie was poisoned — after a fashion. The main ingredient of embalming fluid is a deadly poison called formaldehyde. The white satin dress, after being modeled by several corpses made ready for burial, had soaked up enough formaldehyde to make it a death trap. With the high neckline and the wrist-length sleeves, it covered the greater part of her body. It was like one of those infamous poisoned shirts of the seventeenth century. Georgie rapidly absorbed the poison through her pores when dancing in a warm room. In a few hours she was dead."

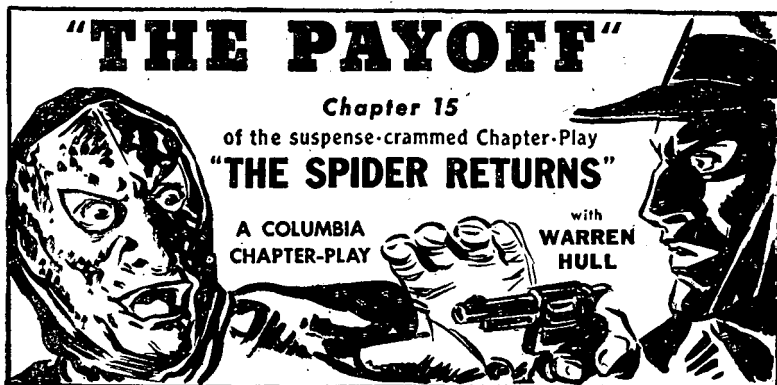
Grimly Quincy shook his head. "How did you know Mrs. Weymouth had something to do with it?"

"It was someone who had knowledge of the dress's being in two places: at Pollard's Funeral Home and at the Webber wedding. Mrs. Weymouth was the only someone. First, she'd delivered the dress to the undertaker from Rudy's place for the body of Julie Underwood. Second, she was at the Webber wedding reception. At the reception, her feminine, seamstress-trained eyes spotted it as the same dress at once. Gilda collapsed and died. Mrs. Weymouth doped out the real reason why the bride died, which was accidental in that case, then posed as a Red Cross worker to get the dress back to send it to her rival for Lenny's love — Georgie."

He started to hunt under the sideboard for his lucky white hat.

Quincy smiled wryly. "The way you came here tonight was providential, Senator. You must let me treat you now for your indigestion."

"My what? Great Godfrey! I clean forgot I had that stummick-ache!"



MIKE'S MAIL

OCTOBER ISSUE VERY BAD!

Have been a subscriber to your magazine for many years, enjoying it very much.

Except for October '81! I really do not appreciate this type of story. I would subscribe to Hitchcock magazine if this was what I wanted.

Please go back to your Mike Shayne stories and leave the supernatural to others, for people who like that kind of writing.

Mrs. W. Loughlin
7732 N. 48th Drive
Glendale, AZ 85301

OCTOBER ISSUE VERY GOOD!

I just finished the September issue, which I felt was better than average (an average already very high in entertainment value and readability) even though the Mike Shayne shipboard "adventure" was a little tame. More slashers and weird villains please. I thought "Blarney" and "Dear Strangler" were the best stories. "Night Run" was good but too padded. The others were okay, not a clinker in the bunch.

Tom Draheim
7A Lynn Shore Dr.
Lynn, MA 01902

P.S. I just got the October issue: very good! Sharp cover!

Well, gang, here's another example of the difference of opinion that cause neighborly disputes, divorces, riots, civil wars, nuclear holocausts, and (continuing in order of increasing importance) editorial heads to turn grey.

The MSMM audience is apparently a pretty wide one, so I do the best I can in providing a variety of good stories so everyone will find some things to enjoy. By the way, the author of "Night Run" has a contract with a major publisher to expand the story into a novel!

Stiff Competition

(BOOK REVIEWS)

by JOHN BALL

Action, adventure, and violence are dished up in generous portions in *The Baltic Emerald* by Edmund Ward, a book that keeps moving from the first page to the last. Furthermore, the background is new, insofar as our knowledge of the genre goes. When trusted jewel courier Joe Bael is murdered, his colleague, Morgan, takes up the trail. Morgan is a very tough, experienced, careful, and resourceful man accustomed to being trusted with millions in gems to be taken from one country to another. The use of background is exceptional in this work, and so is the unique and engaging writing style. A good deal of history creeps into this story, and the author has done his homework. If you can only afford one addition to your suspense library this month, here you are. (St. Martin's Press, \$10.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

William Heffernan has a new book *Caging the Raven* in which the central character is a very thinly distinguished Richard Nixon. The former president is kidnapped by a group of Puerto Rican terrorists in order to enforce their demands concerning independence for their home island. A suitable hue and cry is raised, but the cold fact remains that no one is too anxious to get the hostage back. Finally high ranking, but disliked FBI agent John Henry is given the job of resolving the matter. Henry is a highly competent and conscientious man who goes 126

about his work with, presumably, the fullest cooperation of his own agency, the CIA, and other government bureaus. However his FBI colleagues are not enthusiastic about him, and the CIA does all that it can to thwart him and fry its own fish instead. There is a great deal of talking in the book, particularly between the ex-president and his principal kidnapper. The action scenes are very good; with a little less philosophising this would be a top contender despite the fact that the CIA will have little reason to like it (Wyndham Books [Simon and Schuster] \$13.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

A fascinating picture of New York's subway system, and other underground facilities forms the background for *Malloy's Subway* by novelist R. Wright Campbell. In this very well told suspense tale a young, motiveless killer is loose in the underground maze where he lives with other subterranean dwellers. When he begins a series of stabbings of innocent subway riders, transit authority detective Martin Malloy sets out to track him down. Seldom is the personal dedication of a cop so well documented and made understandable. The killer is very well done, as are his friends who also choose to live below the city where steam pipe tunnels protect them from the cold. The ending is too easily foreseen; otherwise a genuinely different and fascinating book. (Atheneum, \$12.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

George Bellairs is a well-known name in crime writing, but his latest, *Fear Round About*, is not up to his standard. The story makes little sense as a Chief Superintendent of Scotland Yard takes his wife and drives 84 miles to call on a miserly, vile-tempered ex-coroner who wants to make him a business proposition. The credibility goes down from there and the editing job, which is not the author's fault, is inexcusable. Not recommended. (Walker, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

The Balloon Affair is a maiden effort (no pun intended) by three New Mexico ladies writing as Marion Margery Layne. It is strictly a light hearted romp, largely about hot air ballooning. When a new tax on solar energy is imposed on the citizens of this state, a group of balloonists use a big rally as a means of taking up five dignitaries and

kidnapping them simply to call attention to the outrageous tax. No terrorism is involved, but that ol' debbil Mafia pops up and some dope running is dragged in by the heels. The authors take us on a spritely adventure, and the result is a pleasant entertainment, plus a desire to go ballooning. (Dodd Mead, \$8.95)



Ted Allbeury, who is well established in the espionage field, has made a searching study of the Kim Philby incident in his new work, *The Other Side of Silence*. It would not be too much to say that he has opened the whole matter up again for re-evaluation, and he has definitely presented a great deal of what appears to be accurate evidence for the reader to evaluate. Unfortunately, Mr. Allbeury has resorted to a technique of incessant flashbacks that nearly drove this reader out of his mind. Were it not for this serious flaw, this would be a remarkable book, fascinating to read. Those who can endure the flashbacks will find a thoughtful and compelling tale. (Scribners, \$11.95)



If you are willing to suspend credibility, you are pretty certain to enjoy *Killed in the Act* by William L. DeAndrea. This is a very involved and complicated story, but an engaging one, laid in the headquarters of a major TV network. There are plenty of dark goings on and some ingenious gimmicks used. When an innocent young film librarian is murdered, the minor vice president in charge of a "fix-it" division is called upon to investigate. All of the pertinent clues are given to the reader, some in subtle disguises. As indicated, this is not a probable tale, but it is good entertainment. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$12.95)



In celebration of the 50th anniversary of *The Shadow*, Doubleday has brought out a new hardcover edition of two of the best *Shadow* tales, *Jade Dragon* and *House of Ghosts*. Throughout the long history of this celebrated crime fighter the name of the author was given as Maxwell Grant. Within the fraternity it has always been known that the inventive mind that created these stories belonged to Walter B. Gibson. In this new volume Mr. Gibson is at last properly credited as the author and his portrait appears on the jacket. Incidental intelli-

gence: he is also a very skilled magician. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$11.95)



The Villains by Charlotte Keppel is billed as "a haunting tale of the marshes" and although the flap copy suggests that it is contemporary, it is actually laid in 18th century England. There are mysterious goings on and a cupboard filled with weapons, but no supernatural this time, just some true gothic baddies. For lovers of this sub-genre, fine, but it did not seem too exciting to us. That, however, is one man's opinion; others may feel differently. (St. Martin's Press, \$10.95)



An auspicious first novel is *The Valkyrie Project* by Michael Kilian. Two prominent features are the Icelandic background, which is very well done, and an East German hit man who is glacially relentless. The Russians are attempting to set up a very dangerous laser mechanism at a remote locale in Iceland; it is to be aimed at the United States. Since Iceland has both the location and the necessary supply of electrical energy, the story holds together very well. The resolution is foreseeable, as is the fate of the murderer, but this one will keep you reading far into the night just the same. For a first novel, very superior. (St. Martin's Press, \$14.95)



PAPERBACK NOTES: Penguin offers four good books: W. J. Burley's *Wycliffe in St. Paul's Court*, which we liked very much in hardcover, Julian Symon's *Sweet Adeline*, *The Gay Phoenix*, by the scholarly and prolific Michael Innes and, praise be, *Beware of the Trains*, a short but classic work by Edmund Crispin, an author who has left us a fine legacy of Gervase Fen tales.

More Haunted Houses awaits your shudders in the Bantam edition, together with eight pages of pictures, one of the late Jayne Mansfield and several of structures that are well spooked of in occult circles. Pleasant dreams!

Lastly, some new titles from Raven House: *Return to Murder* by Mary Ann Taylor, *The Sweeper* by Gary Paulsen, and *Karma* by Susan Dunlap. Raven House frequently uses pseudonyms, but all three authors carry the credentials of the Mystery Writers of America. ●

BEST BY MAIL

For rates, write National Classified, Box 5, Sarasota, Fla. 33578

MERCHANDISE FOR SALE

MEN'S Kromatron Electra watch, \$19.95. Great gift! Lowry Enterprises, Box 12, Portage, WI. 53901

FIREWORKS! Giant color catalog, \$2.00. Refundable. Fireworks Unlimited, Deerfield, Oh. 44411

UNUSUAL ITEMS

GREAT Radio Programs — mystery, detective, adventure, science-fiction. On cassettes, free list. Rare Radio, Dept. D. Box 117, Sunland, Ca. 91040

MONEYMAKING OPPORTUNITIES

WANT financial independence? Send \$1.00 for Opportunity News. Workology, 1329 Desire St., New Orleans, La. 70117

\$1,500/WEEKLY stuffing envelopes?! NuWay, 8753 Windom, Overland, Mo. 63114

HOW To Earn A Billion Dollars In 25 Years. Manual \$25.00. Workology, 1329 Desire St., New Orleans, La. 70117

MAKE money wholesaling. Details free. Elmore, Box 17058, Phila., Pa. 19105

THE ABC's of Mail Order Billionaires. Catalog \$2.00. Workology, 1329 Desire St., New Orleans, La. 70117

HEALTH & BEAUTY

MELLOW-fresh milk alternative. Low in fat and cholesterol. Made from whey, a nutritious by-product of cheese. Brochure and price list available. Nelson J. Williams, Jr., 1235(SS) N. Ledlie, Springfield, Il. 62702

PERSONAL - MISCELLANEOUS

REAL Estate Counterattack Manual, \$15. Workology, 1329 Desire St., New Orleans, La. 70117

PROFESSIONAL fund raisers needed for international organization. Free training, high earnings. Free details. Collins, Inc., 323 So. Franklin, Chicago, Il. 60606

\$\$\$\$ FOR information about theft, sabotage or drug usage in companies. Angel, PO Box 94521, Schaumburg, Il. 60194

SINGLE Music Lovers meet thru sharing similar musical interests. Nationwide. Box 1381(MS), Rapid City, S.D. 57709

MILLIONS Of Women Seeking American Husbands. Learn where to contact them. Compare clubs before you join! The International Directory of Introduction Services, \$7.95. Love Press, Box 10725(N), Costa Mesa, Ca. 92627

JAPANESE Girls Make wonderful wives. Let us introduce you to an unspoiled Oriental Beauty. \$2.00 brings photos, descriptions, application. Japan International, Box 156(MS), Carnelian Bay, Ca. 95711

CLASSIFIEDS PAY! Free rate folio. National Classified, Box 5, Sarasota, Fla. 33578

GROUND FLOOR OPPORTUNITY

Hottest multi-level marketing plan ever! Surpassing all records for growth, public response unparalleled. **UNLIMITED EARNING POTENTIAL.** Send \$1.00 for information. Don't wait. Send today.

KATZ ENTERPRISES MS
1019 Merchant, Effington, IL. 62407

MAIL ORDER OFFERS

DELICATE Chinese cooking. Send \$1.00 for recipe to: Union International, 1230 Grant Ave., #101, San Francisco, Ca. 94133

SHANES Record Finding Service. Send requests plus 3 — 18¢ stamps for catalog. Shane, Box 6314(WM), San Rafael, Ca. 94903

"THE COMPLETE Home Budget Book", saves you money. Budget Inc., Box 4-2415(W7), Anchorage, Ak. 99509. \$10.00 Postpaid. Satisfaction guaranteed.

Hypnotize By Phone

AMAZING new technique actually allows you to hypnotize people over the phone. It can work on strangers as well as friends. Send \$9.95 to:

FSI, Box 273
Blue Springs, MO. 64015

Got Basic Cable TV?

With our descrambler/converter receive new release movies, sport news, and most all pay channels in your area **"FREE"**. Catalog \$1.00 (refundable).

ST. JUDE / ES, Box 563
Huntington Station, N.Y. 11746



BE A DETECTIVE

LEARN AT HOME
BY MAIL

DIPLOMA • BADGE •

JOB PLACEMENT • CAREER GUIDANCE

Methods used by top sleuths! Earn steady pay full or part time. Big demand for Global graduates in civil, criminal, military, accident investigation. Send for **FREE** Booklet. No obligation. Money-back Guarantee.

GLOBAL School of Investigation, T15

P.O. Box 191-D, Hanover, Ma. 02339

TURN \$38.00 INTO \$19,456

Doing absolutely NOTHING!



GUARANTEED. Now you can actually get rich **DOING NOTHING!** No gimmicks, no work, no baloney. Not a book, course or manual but a solid, sound, big time investment for the little guy. This priceless information package sent to you for only \$8.00 ppd. Use the package for 30 days and if not fully satisfied, return it for your full \$8.00 refund. No questions-asked. Get started immediately...rush \$8.00 to:

AMERGUILD, 1038 N. TUSTIN AVE.
SUITE 227 • ORANGE, CALIF. 92667

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE is the best in the field. Featuring a complete Mike Shayne story in every issue, as well as short stories and novelettes by top mystery writers from all over the world, it's a reading treat you can't afford to miss. Right now, while you're in the mood, fill out the coupon below and send it with your check or money order, and we'll see that your favorite mystery magazine will be waiting in your mailbox every month earlier than you can find it on the newsstands. Allow 6-8 weeks for start.

CLIP OR COPY THIS COUPON:

**RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.
P.O. BOX 178
RESEDA, CA 91335**

Enter my subscription to:

**MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE
U.S. FUNDS ONLY**

	U.S.A		CANADA		FOREIGN	
1 year	\$18.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$21.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$24.00	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 years	\$32.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$38.00	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$40.00	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please check correct box

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____ **ZIP** _____

Please print

Who will claim the victim?

If you're searching for a mystery, here's a clue: new Raven House Mysteries. Books so frighteningly well-written, you can't help but let the mystery take over your life.

Each murderous crime is so devious that just because you can solve one, doesn't mean you can solve them all.

Raven House publishes new mysteries every month. Look for them wherever paperbacks are sold.

